THE

NOVICE;

OR,

THE MAN OF INTEGRITY.

FROM THE FRENCH OF

L. B. PICARD,

AUTHOR OF THE GIL BLAS OF THE REVOLUTION,
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAP. I.

PERPLEXITIES AND VEXATIONS.

During their journey, Dharville expressed more warmly to his friend than he had before done, how grateful he felt for the services he had rendered him; and yet he was ignorant what a severe sacrifice that friend had made, when he quitted Paris in order to hasten to him at Aix-la-Chapelle; nor did he know how ingeniously Dercy had continued to send away the two adventurers, and thus

rescue him from their machinations. George was touched by these expressions of gratitude on the part of Dharville; but, no longer under any apprehension on his account, all his thoughts were now occupied by the idea of Victorine. Twenty times he was on the point of unbosoming himself to the Count; but was each time withheld from doing so by the fear of being indiscreet. Great indeed was his anxiety to reach Paris: he and his friend now seemed to have exchanged characters; for Dharville had lost something of his wonted hurry and impetuosity, and always eager after amusement, would have stopped longer at each place, where they halted, that he might look about the town, and see the public places and pretty women; while George, who usually complied with the humours of others, and was ever ready to accommodate himself entirely to circumstances, became impatient, complained of the slowness of the horses, of the

negligence of the drivers; and insisted upon travelling all night, as well as all day. Hitherto it was always he who had complied with whatever his friend proposed or desired; but now Dharville was obliged to humour him, and accede to his wishes; and it was out of mere complaisance towards George, that he bestowed his invectives so plentifully on the postillions.

It was night, and they had already passed through Peronne, when George, a little more tranquil at the rapidity with which they travelled, judged it to be his duty, although his thoughts were incessantly occupied with Victorine, to remonstrate with Dharville on his past imprudence. "May I hope," said he, "that the dangers which we have just escaped will render you more cautious for the future? See into what a frightful abyss you were on the point of falling, owing to your inconsiderate disposition, your love of pleasure, and that *etourderie* of which, I am sorry to say,

you so often seem to make a point of honour. You are sincere, just, feeling, and generous: these are the principal qualities requisite to form a virtuous character, but are they sufficient of themselves, and unless supported by others? It is necessary to possess also discretion and self-controul." Dharville did not attempt to interrupt this well-meant exhortation; for, to say the truth, he had fallen into a doze at the beginning. "I am glad to find by your silence," continued George, "that you approve of what I say. I am far from proposing myself to you as a model. I have, I am conscious, many faults, but at least I know how to govern my passions. They were now arrived at a steep ascent, and the horses slackened their pace. "Driver, go on faster," cried George hastily.

"But, sir, we are going up hill."

"No matter, I will give you a double fee, if you trot up the hill."

The postillion did not want to have this repeated to him twice, so, at the risk of killing his horses, he flogged them up the hill. This little parley with the post-boy had quite woke Dharville again, who now very distinctly heard what George thought proper to add to his former exhortations. "Yes," continued he, "I know how to reflect before I act, how to bend myself to circumstances, to strain my impatience, and bear whatever happens with calmness."

"I compliment you on your admirable self-controul."

"By wishing to perform more than can be accomplished, and by too great eagerness and precipitation, we are always sure to do harm."

Scarcely had he uttered these last words when one of the wheels broke, and the carriage was overturned with great violence, though happily neither of our travellers received any personal injury. "What a confounded, awkward scoundrel!" cried

George to the postillion in not the most placid tone of voice; nor did his rage and ill-humour at all abate, on hearing Dharville burst into a hearty laugh. "Aye, aye," cried he, "'tis very well for you to laugh: you have nothing to hurry you, but can travel as you please."

"Come, come, my good philosopher, you who know so well how to restrain your impatience, and bear whatever happens with calmness, ought we not to think ourselves fortunate in escaping without broken limbs? the accident will only detain us an hour or two—that's all."

"How! an hour or two," exclaimed Dercy, scrambling out of the chaise as well as he could, "I'll be hanged though if it shall:" and he instantly leaped on the horse from which the postillion was just dismounted; and having detached the trace that held him to the pole, said, "Dharville, we shall see each other at Paris," and immediately set off at full speed.

"George, my good fellow," cried the Count after him, "be sure that you do not forget the remainder of your lecture on impatience, against that time!" Then, on perceiving the rapidity with which his friend seemed determined to pursue his journey, he added, "Ha! ha! my dear George, you must have something monstrously pressing indeed, something in which you must be very much interested. Well, though I cannot now overtake you, I will not be long behind: who knows but that now I may be able to serve you in return?" As soon, therefore, as he could reach an inn, he sent persons to raise the chaise, and, taking a horse himself, set forward without any delay.

It was about six o'clock in the morning, when our hero, mounted in so singular a manner, arrived at Bourget, when, instead of pursuing his route straight to Paris, he turned off a little from the main road, and in somewhat more than an hour was close by M.

Dubrocard's park, where he stopped, although he could hardly tell himself what was his next object, or how he intended to proceed. He hoped that he might meet with Victorine herself, as she was going on an early ramble with her Bonne, for the purpose of making sketches; but, on reflection, he dared hardly flatter himself that such would be the case; for although the morning was an exceedingly fine one, the autumn was now considerably advanced, and the trees had already lost much of their foliage. Alighting from his horse, he wandered for some time under the park wall, and at length ventured to approach the little door through which he was to have entered at the appointed interview—the interview he had been under the cruel and painful necessity of foregoing. Madame Deschamps had told him that it was generally unlocked, and, on trying, he found that it was so; still he dared not to enter, but looked in very cautiously, as if afraid

of detection, until at length, to his great joy, he perceived the old gouvernante herself, who was knitting under some trees. He immediately went towards her, when, on seeing him, she screamed out, and exclaimed in a tone both of surprise and anger: "What, is it you! dare you, after your unhandsome, and even shameful behaviour, show yourself before me? Begone, Sir, leave me instantly, or I will call some one to my assistance!"

"For Heaven's sake, my dear Madame Deschamps!—"

"Leave me, I say! What! to ask for an interview, and then, instead of keeping your appointment, merely to write! Only think if I had, as I was tempted to do, mentioned it to poor Victorine!"

"But at least hear what I have to say."

"No, Sir—let me request you, too, to go away from here directly, for if you should be seen—"

Notwithstanding his earnest solicitations, the utmost that George could obtain was a promise from the gouvernante that she would let him speak to her in the evening, in the place where he had before met her; but she insisted on his then leaving her directly—a command which he found it necessary to obey.

The promise which he had received from Madame Deschamps had revived all his hopes; and he therefore proceeded to Paris, comparatively at ease, satisfied with himself for having done all that friendship demanded of him, and trusting that love would not be unpropitious towards him. And while indulging in pleasing anticipations of the future, he felt but little fatigue from the exertions he had recently undergone. Therefore on his arrival in town, he merely laid down for about a couple of hours, and scarcely had he risen from this slight repose, when Dharville, who had travelled with almost as much dispatch as himself,

was ushered into his apartment. Persuaded that there must have been some more than ordinary motive to induce his friend to act with a precipitation and impatience so foreign to his character, the Count began to question him in a jesting, rattling manner, which tended only to render George more reserved and unwilling to unbosom himself. Touched however by the sincere and unaffected friendship which Dharville manifested towards him, he did not attempt to conceal that his mind was intensely occupied with a subject of the utmost importance to him; yet he requested him at the same time not to insist upon being made acquainted with it, assuring him that should he require the good offices of any friend he would certainly apply to him in preference to any one else. Imagining that Dercy's uneasiness arose merely from the circumstance of his having been dismissed from the situation he held, the Count

determined within himself to neglect no means of restoring him to the Duke's favour, and also, if possible, to remove Darvert, against whom he felt greatly irritated. Having again professed eternal friendship for George, he took leave of him, for the purpose of calling upon a great many acquaintance, to all of whom—at least to such as would listen to him, he drew a brilliant picture of the devotion, the courage, and the generosity of his friend. Nor did he affect to slur over his own indiscretions, but related the whole affair of his duel, and of his silly attachment to the *soi-disante* Russian countess, so that before night almost all his friends were informed of what had taken place at Aix-la-Chapelle.

With what impatience did George wait for the arrival of the evening! He was this time at his rendezvous most punctually, long indeed before Madame

Deschamps: at length he perceived her coming from the neighbour's where she had been indulging in her accustomed evening gossip; and hurried to meet her. "Do not imagine that I am come to listen to you," said she, now more irritated against him than in the morning; "'tis you must listen to me: we know all your proceedings—we have been informed of everything—of your whole conduct."

"Well, and do you know anything ill of me?"

"Ill indeed!—why we know that you are a very vile man—a libertine and gamester, and you associate with one who is quite as bad as yourself—a M. Marville, or Charville, or some such name, with whom you have been rambling about,—that you each of you have a mistress, either in Holland, or Prussia, or thereabouts. I don't know exactly where; but I know that it is somewhere out of France."

"And who is it that has been propagating these calumnious reports?"

"Who?—a person who is very well informed."

"But let me know his name."

"Very likely indeed, that I should tell you! Such a quarrelsome, fighting gentleman as you are would soon go and raise a disturbance with him, for we know very well that you have just been fighting a duel."

"I!"

"Yes, you: I can tell you, too, that you fought with pistols, and shot your adversary,—or at least the poor Dutchman is so badly wounded that he will never recover."

"What a horrible slander! and does Victorine then believe that all this is true?"

"Yes; she was present when your fine achievements were the subject of conversation."

"She was present?—and she, doubtless, hates me?"

"I don't know:—she is so good that I believe she hates no one. The first thing she asked when informed of the duel was, 'Is he wounded?' and when answered in the negative, I perceived that the poor girl felt much relieved."

"And was she then really anxious on my account?"

"No; do not flatter yourself with that idea: it was nothing more than that kind of pity she would feel for the most indifferent person in the world. Not one individual in the family feels any interest or concern about you; and I can assure you with regard to myself, that you must not expect to deceive me or soften me any more. To-morrow we all return to town: but do not attempt to see me when we get to Paris, for I intend to acquaint M. Dubrocard with your whole conduct; and he, I am sure, will shut his doors against you."

Having uttered these words she walked on, leaving George quite confounded and stupified, so much so that he was obliged to stop a few minutes before he could recover his ideas: he then returned slowly and dejectedly to Paris.

We have informed our readers that Dharville had lost no time in speaking every where of George, and his noble and generous conduct; but in his warmth and his eagerness to praise him, his account of the transactions was not always clear and intelligible, and the facts became still more distorted and misrepresented in passing from mouth to mouth, so that when the story reached M. Dauvert's ears it was little conformable to truth. And, in relating them to the Dubrocards, with whom he dined that day, that gentleman, who, as we have seen on a former occasion, was not the most scrupulous narrator in the world, had added several little ornaments and 'graces' of his own, doubtless

merely with the good-natured intention of entertaining his listeners, although it must be confessed that these additions by no means told in favour of his 'dear George.' The reader has already learnt how greatly the story was altered in passing from M. Dauvert to the ears of the gouvernante.

Dercy was distressed beyond all description, and would have written directly to Madame Deschamps to justify himself, but then what should he write? He was in the embarrassing situation of one who needs only relate the simple truth in order completely to exculpate himself: but then he conceived that both delicacy and honour forbade his making such a disclosure. Many others would have been eager to speak of all that had happened, but George—could he prevail upon himself to reveal the errors of his friend Dharville? Would it not seem as if he wished to praise himself at his expense?

CHAP. II.

FRESH SUCCESSES OF DAUVERT.

At the very time that our hero met with such a repulse on the part of Madame Deschamps, Dharville, impatient to see the Duke of * * *, went to look for him at the opera. There, coming to the subject at once without much circumlocution, he complained bitterly to his Grace of the manner in which his friend had been treated, whom he defended with the utmost warmth, whilst he was not sparing, on the other hand, of his reflections on M. Ferdinand Dauvert, saying that he was a paltry, time-serving fellow, a man equally destitute of principle and talent. The Duke listened to his eulogium and invective

with the greatest imperturbility and coolness. "Well," cried he, when the Count had finished, "this may be all very true :—your friend Dercy is a man of the strictest integrity, one of the most honest creatures in the world, but then he is quite a novice. Dauvert is, I grant you, a time-serving sycophant, but he is also a very clever fellow. The former has not a single spark of ambition in his whole composition; how then is it possible for me to do any thing for him, or make any thing of him? I believe Dauvert is very superficial, and not very well-informed; but he is determined to make his way, consequently he is submissive, complaisant, and full of flattery: this is the kind of man we want—or rather my successor wants."

"How! your successor!"

"Yes, my successor: do you not know then that I am no longer in office?"

Dercy had been absent from Paris but a very few days; yet in this interval, short

as it was, one of those political changes had taken place, with which experience ought by this time to have familiarized us. The ministry had been changed, and the Duke was not included in the new one. All Paris, all France, were talking of this event; Dharville alone was ignorant of it. The intelligence had not reached Aix-la-Chapelle before he quitted that place; and ever since he had been constantly travelling, or stopping only to change horses: and in the numerous calls he had made during the course of the day, since his return to Paris, he had been so intent upon eulogizing his friend and extolling him to every one, that he had given no one an opportunity of telling him any news. He was therefore quite astonished at hearing that the Duke was no longer in the ministry; nor was his Grace at all less astonished at finding that Dharville was ignorant of what all the rest of the world knew. The latter hardly knew whether

he ought to condole with the Duke or not, so little did his Grace appear to regret his removal from power; and so indifferent did this man, who had all his life been devoted to ambition, seem to be to all that had hitherto had for him so keen an interest: even this had now lost its stimulus. Besides, the Duke had not been dismissed in disgrace; on the contrary, in addition to the customary pension and the rank of a minister of state, he retired loaded with honours and titles; he had one of the first places at court; and from some words which he casually let fall, it was easy for Dharville to perceive that he still retained considerable influence in public affairs. His Grace had always piqued himself upon his talent for *persiflage;* and now that he was no longer in office, his love for it seemed to have increased, whether it was natural or merely affected. "And this intriguing

manœuvring Dauvert," said the Count, "has retained his place?"

"Of course," returned his Grace, "he is not one of those kind of persons who are dismissed: I have myself recommended him to the new minister—he has been of so much service at the elections!" Then suddenly changing the conversation, he began to banter Dharville on his late adventures, of which he had heard in the course of the day. "You find," said he, "that I am better acquainted with the news of Aix-la-Chapelle than you are with that of Paris."

The Count replied only a few words, and then left the box to go to the saloon. There, too, he began to sound the praises of his friend Dercy to every one whom he could get to listen to him, and expressed his resentment that he should have been deprived of his situation; yet was both surprised and mortified to find that nobody seemed to be at all interested

in the subject, but anxious either to talk of his own affairs, or of the opera-dancers. He determined, nevertheless, to go his rounds among his friends the next morning, for the purpose of serving George, and opening the eyes of every-one with regard to Dauvert. He did not at all know the Duke's successor, but he was quite certain of making friends with those about him.

It was at this juncture that M. Dauvert displayed more successfully than ever his consummate address, his dexterity, and his knowledge of the world: in addition to favours, gratuities, and honorary titles, which he obtained on his former patron's retreat from office, and the post which had formerly been held by Dercy, and which he still retained, he in a few days gained a greater ascendancy over the new minister than he had had over his predecessor; while even of the latter he still remained the protegee, the intimate, and the favourite.

He did not suffer himself to be idle; all his mornings were devoted to his official employments; besides this, he was most assiduous in his visits to the Duke, his former protector, always offering to execute for him any little services, helping him to receive his company on those days when he received visits or gave audiences; for, although no longer in office, the old *ci-devant* minister was fond, we might almost say childishly fond, of holding levees and giving audiences. While he was thus the favoured protegee of their two Excellencies, Dauvert still contrived to find time to act the obsequious friend to M. and Madame Dubrocard, and the ardent lover towards their daughter. How was he able to attend to so many things? It is not a little that will fatigue an ambitious man, and one determined to make his way in the world. The news of his approaching marriage with the daughter of the Receiver-General began now to be rumoured abroad; and

this report served only to increase Dharville's anger. "This is really too much," cried he; "what, shall he rob my friend not only of his place, but of his intended wife too! No, I will never suffer it"

However well established a man's good fortune may be, it is very dangerous for him to have an active and persevering enemy. In less than three days' time, Dharville had been so busy in spreading every where the duplicity and perfidy of Dauvert, that the latter became quite alarmed. Nothing to his disadvantage had yet reached the ears of either the Minister or the Receiver-General; but he already perceived that many persons began to manifest much reserve and coldness towards him, and to seem as if they no longer cared to notice him; and even the old Duke, although he still admitted him, did not spare his sarcastic reflections What was to be done? Can resources ever be wanting to those clever fellows who know so well how to turn to account

the simplicity of others! Dauvert went again to find his good friend, George Dercy.

The latter, entirely occupied with his love for Victorine, and with forming stratagems how to see her, was continually on the watch in the neighbourhood of M. Dubrocard's hotel; and had, at length, summoned up sufficient resolution to write a long letter of explanations to Madame Deschamps; which he was on the point of going out to carry to her himself, when his visitor was announced. With many expressions of sorrow and concern, Dauvert explained to his old schoolfellow, who, he said, must know the purity of his intentions, how greatly he had been misrepresented. "You know," said he, "that if I, in the first instance, accepted your place, it was with the intention of keeping it for you, and if I have since retained it, it has happened because you appeared to care so little about it yourself. You know too, that if I ven-

tured to resign myself to my passion for the charming Alphonsine, it was because, according to your own confession, you did not aspire to her hand. How happens it then, that so many calumnious reports are spread abroad with regard to me? I do not accuse you; for I am far from imagining that you are at all concerned in propagating such frightful attacks upon my character; still, I appeal to your friendship and your generosity. Under such circumstances, are you not called upon to come forward? It is beneath me to reply to such malicious scandal; yet would it not be no more than proper in you to reply to them for me?—An idea has just struck me; in order to close the mouths of all these idle and mischievous gossips, nothing more is requisite than that you should show yourself with me at the theatres and other public places; and thus prove that nothing has interrupted our friendship."

To this proposal, George replied at

first by a few indifferent words; but all of a sudden a gleam of hope broke in upon him, as he saw in it the means of again seeing Victorine. "I am not offended with you," said he to Dauvert; "nor have I ever been so. You propose to me to show myself with you in public; you are aware that I live here quite a recluse life, but there is always a great deal of company at M. Dubrocard's; and, in fact, I should not be sorry to visit there again; if, therefore, you will undertake to engage that I shall be received, I am ready to accompany you thither. Because Mademoiselle and I," added he with a smile, "are not formed for each other, is that any reason why her father should shut his doors against me?"

While George was speaking, Dauvert hastily calculated how he ought to act; and as he was quite certain that Dercy was not his rival with the lady, he promised to exert all his influence in George's favour with the Receiver-General."

"Is not this exceedingly fortunate?" cried George, as soon as he was alone: "Dauvert is quite welcome both to retain the place, and marry the rich heiress who was to have fallen to my lot; since it is through his scheming for himself that I shall again have an opportunity of beholding Victorine. Am I wrong, after all, in saying, that those who attempt to injure me frequently do me service in the end!"

Dercy had from the very first blamed his friend Dharville's outcries against Dauvert; but now he was quite alarmed lest, if he persisted in them, all his plans would be defeated; he therefore hastened to the Count, and entreated him not to say a syllable respecting the manœuvres and cabals of his quondam schoolfellow. It was not without extreme reluctance that Dharville yielded to George's earnest intreaties; but the latter appeared to be so very solicitous that Dauvert should be left unmolested,

that, however contrary to his inclination, he yielded to Dercy's solicitations.

The desire of preventing any bad effect from the invectives launched against him was not the sole motive that had induced Dauvert to renew his intimacy with George. He returned the following day to our hero, to inform him that he had already spoken in his favour to M. Dubrocard; that he should return to the subject again that very evening; and assured him, that he would very soon bring about an entire reconciliation between him and the Receiver-General. At length, after having said all that he could to convince George that he was really anxious to serve him, and having assured him how much he valued his friendship, he, in the most wheedling manner, requested a fresh favour of him. The Duke's successor wanted a complete and detailed account relative to the offices connected with his department, and M. Dauvert had been commissioned

to draw this up; but intriguing being more his forte than a talent for furnishing such information, he had neither the leisure nor the ability to execute the task the Minister had imposed upon him, and he conceived that George would be more *au fait* on the subject, and more capable of writing on it than any one else. As soon as he understood what it was that Dauvert wanted, Dercy promised to do it for him; and then set about writing the work with as much care and assiduity as he had formerly bestowed on the themes and tasks of M. Ferdinand, when they were at school. "What!" cried Dharville to George, when informed of what he was doing, "another act of complaisance and kindness to this fellow! You are taking all the pains, and he will reap all the honour. Thanks to you, instead of being convinced of the ignorance and insufficiency of this pretender, the new Minister will be led to form a very high opinion of his

abilities. Good God! how you suffer yourself to be imposed upon, and made a tool of!"

"Not at all," replied Dercy with a smile; "I am not imposed upon. If what I am about, can be of any service, I am ready to do it; and let Dauvert have the credit of it if he will; so that it is attended with any good, I shall be quite satisfied."

Dauvert was as good as his word as far as regarded the reconciliation of the Receiver-General to our hero; for it was not long before the latter received a note from M. Dubrocard, inviting him to be present at the signing the marriage articles between M. Ferdinand Dauvert and Mademoiselle Alphonsine.

The Receiver-General and his lady thought too that they could do no less than ask the Doctor and Madame Saint Firmin, on the same occasion; but they both indignantly rejected the invitation. When informed that Dercy was

to be present, Madame exclaimed: ' Our nephew can have no spirit whatever in him! What, to go and sign as a witness the marriage articles of a successful rival,—the very contract to which he ought to have set his hand as the husband!"

"Madam," replied the Doctor, "he will always be the same; to the very end of his life he will continue to act like a novice and a blockhead."

CHAP. III.

A DECLARATION OF MARRIAGE.

How happy George was in accepting M. Dubrocard's invitation! but, at the same time, this satisfaction was not entirely unmixed with a feeling of uneasiness. What was the reception he was likely to meet with, after the reports that had been spread to his prejudice? He feared that he should see cold and repulsive countenances, and find a distant though polite welcome. When he reached the Receiver-General's, the court-yard was blocked up with carriages, as there was a numerous dinner party of the chief family connexions previously to the signing of the contract. The first person that Dercy perceived was the old gouvernante; nor did the sight of her seem to him the

most auspicious omen, or serve to lessen his agitation. But how agreeably was he surprised when the old lady approached very kindly, and inquired after his health, saying that it gave her great pleasure to see him again. He then entered the drawing-room, where Dauvert, looking as gaily as so happy an occasion required, came to welcome him, and presented him to Madame Dubrocard and her fair daughter. Both the ladies were most splendidly dressed, especially the latter, and they received George in the most kind and flattering manner. M. Dubrocard himself came up and shook hands with him in a way that testified how completely he was disposed to be on the best terms with him. This part of the ceremony having been dispatched, Dercy's eyes wandered over the room in search of her who was in fact the sole attraction that had drawn him there; and he discovered her seated near one of the windows amid a groupe of

young persons. Victorine was at the moment looking towards him; he bowed respectfully to her, and had the delight of finding that his salutation was returned in the most graceful and winning manner, accompanied by a smile that almost repaid him for all he had endured.

In the midst of his rapture, George was rather puzzled to know to what to attribute a reception so much more favourable than what he had dared to anticipate; and as the reader may, perhaps, be somewhat surprised too, we must inform him that it was all owing to M. Dauvert, who had perceived it to be to his interest that Dercy should be flatteringly received. When he had first proposed the subject, M. Dubrocard exclaimed: "What! open my doors again to a man of a notorious, dissolute character, to a gamester!"

"Ha!" returned Dauvert, "and have I not yet told you that all this has been very satisfactorily explained?" saying

which, he proceeded to relate all the circumstances connected with his friend's visit to Aix-la-Chapelle, giving quite a different turn and colouring to them, than he had done before; now taking as much pains to set them in a favourable light as he had at first to place them in a disadvantageous one. Victorine had been present at this second edition of the story, and had not neglected to justify the hero of it to Madame Deschamps.

What were the ideas that crossed our hero's mind, on taking up the pen to sign the marriage contract of his rival and the wealthy heiress? "When," thought he, "shall I be able to sign thus the contract that is to ratify my own happiness?" and his eyes involuntarily strayed to Victorine. Encouraged by the propitious aspect which every thing now assumed for him, he felt that he might venture to hope for the realization of his fondest wishes, and this gave him a degree of confidence not very

usual to him; and he even ventured to approach the youthful groupe where Victorine still continued conversing with her companions. Many of these were anticipating the delight they should receive at the wedding of their friend Alphonsine, and talking of the dresses they intended to wear in honour of that joyful occasion. A young gentleman now addressed one of the fair speakers in this little coterie, and very gallantly solicited her hand for the first country-dance on the happy day in question. Another was about to make the same proposal to Victorine, when George, who saw that not an instant was to be lost, summoned up sufficient courage, and anticipated him in his request, which was immediately accepted. What happiness, what delightful hopes now animated him! He should dance with her—should have an opportunity of speaking to her—perhaps might venture to press her fair hand! Filled with more

confidence than he had ever before felt, and inspired by the most blissful hopes, he now thought that every difficulty was removed, and promised himself that he would seize an opportunity of declaring his passion to the beautiful orphan.

This day, so impatiently expected by more than one person, was however put off in consequence of a very untoward event. The Duke of * * *, Dauvert's first patron, had had an apoplectic attack that threatened his life. Quite secure as to his receiving the hand of the fair Alphonsine, Dauvert was not sorry to have an opportunity of publicly demonstrating his attachment for the Duke, and insisted upon the ceremony being deferred for the present. Madame Dubrocard did not fail to remark to all her acquaintance: "How very *mal-aprôpos* this has happened for M. Dauvert; but there is no help for it: he is, as every one well knows, so intimate with the Duke, that it is impos-

sible that the marriage should take place while his Grace continues in such danger." Perhaps George was more afflicted at this delay than Dauvert himself, since he dared not go to M. Dubrocard's so frequently as he could wish, and whenever he did, could hardly ever find an opportunity of speaking to Victorine. At length the Duke's recovery was announced, and the wedding-day fixed.

The ceremony was a very splendid one, and his Grace condescended to honour it with his presence for a short time. What a sensation did the presence of so distinguished a personage create among all the visitors! What an honour conferred upon the Dubrocard family! It was not without emotion that George beheld a man from whom he had formerly received obligations, and who was now so much altered by illness: he made him a profound bow, which was answered merely by an inclination

of the head. The old nobleman, however, frequently glanced at his *ci-devant* protegee; sometimes looking at him with an expression of interest, as if he considered him a worthy young man; then again with a kind of ironical compassion, as if he thought him onedestitute of tact and discernment.

The ball commenced: and how did the first sounds of the instruments cause Dercy's heart to palpitate! Each gentleman hastened to select his partner; and in the brilliant crowd of beauties George had eyes only for Victorine, whose hand he caught with a tremor of pleasure that vibrated through his frame. Victorine was not an accomplished dancer in point of science; but she had so much natural grace in her motions, that every beholder was struck by it, and George absolutely in raptures: so much so, as more than once to forget the figure of the dance, and nearly put out the rest, had he not been set right

by her who had caused his abstraction. It was on leading her back to her seat that he had resolved upon speaking of the passion he felt for her; but when that opportunity arrived, instead of availing himself of it, he stood beside her without uttering a word. He again danced with her, and again promised himself that he would exert more resolution, yet without greater success; for all that he could prevail upon himself to say were a few indifferent words, and even these he did not pronounce without much agitation. Time however was advancing, and a favourable opportunity, such a one as he might not meet with again, was on the point of being lost: this idea almost completed his mortification and confusion. In one of the rooms used for dancing were several engravings and drawings; among the latter he perceived some views of M. Dubrocard's park and country-house: he looked very attentively for some

minutes at one of these drawings, all of which were executed by Victorine. "Oh!" said she, "I perceive that you are going to criticize my work: pray do not look at that view; it is almost one of the first things I ever did."

"I look at it with a delight that I cannot well express," replied George.

"And why?"

"Because when I was not permitted to have the happiness of visiting you, it was there, under those linden trees, that I used to go, that I might, at least, have the pleasure of beholding the house where you resided. Oh! Mademoiselle," continued he, "let us not be again separated: allow me to ask M. Dubrocard for permission to dedicate to you my existence."

"M. Dercy, you astonish me—you astonish me very much; for heaven's sake let us break off this conversation."

They were now summoned to a fresh dance; but Victorine begged of George to excuse her, saying that she felt fa-

tigued, and should go and sit beside her aunt; George followed her, and seized the opportunity of saying: "Have I offended you, Mademoiselle?"

"No; but if you were to speak to M. Dubrocard, you would certainly distress me very much."

Dercy did not venture to make any remonstrance, but quitted the ball with all his hopes destroyed. "She absolutely rejects me," said he. "I see that all she feels for me is nothing more than a cold esteem, almost indifference: and who knows but that her heart has already decided in favour of another?—Yes, now indeed I am the most unfortunate of beings."

CHAP. IV.

A WILL.

In wealthy families a round of entertainments, visits, and amusements, generally take place for the first month or two after a wedding. But this life of gaiety and agreeable racket was not that of our new-married couple, both of whom spent all their time in bestowing the most assiduous cares on the Duke of * * *. This wealthy and still powerful individual—although he no longer held any place in the ministry,—was now full of pains and infirmities. Since his attack of apoplexy he had left off going to the opera. A widower, and without children, he had no other heirs than distant relations, none of whom were on good terms with him. Was not therefore, Dauvert, his protegee,

his creature, and his favourite, called upon to show himself all attention, affection, and devotion towards him? He was indeed obliged sometimes to quit his Grace, in order to attend to the affairs of the many lucrative situations which he now held; but the beautiful Alphonsine was always ready to take her husband's place by the easy-chair or bed-side of the invalid. If he was sad, she endeavoured to cheer his spirits; if he suffered from pain, she condoled with him; and if he was able to stir about at all, her arm was always at his service, to help him to walk up and down the room, or in the garden. Always romantic and full of fine feelings, she was delighted and proud to display towards him a tender respect, and an attachment almost filial; and she declared that she would be his Antigone. These attentions of a young and handsome woman were not received with ingratitude by the aged courtier.

Ever since the marriage of her cousin,

Victorine had been extremely reserved with George. In all the visits that he had since paid Madame Dubrocard, she had not given him a single opportunity of speaking to her alone; nor did she seem to be any longer the animated and cheerful girl that she had formerly been, always eager to welcome him and glad to see him; but she was now a serious young woman, and conducted herself towards him with more politeness than formerly, but with less affability. In spite of all his modesty, Dercy could not but be conscious that an offer from him was too advantageous to be slighted, except from some very powerful motive: and what could this motive be? except what he had surmised, namely, a prior attachment towards some favoured rival—an idea that was absolutely intolerable to him. He now endeavoured to call to mind all those who had opportunities of approaching Victorine; but he found that some were too gay and dissipated,

others too great coxcombs, and too much occupied with their own persons: this was a respectable and unassuming young man, but then he was destitute of either talent or information; that was clever and amusing, but then he was of an ambitious and mercenary disposition. How then should such characters be able to create an interest in a mind so pure?

One morning Dharville came to interrupt these reveries of our hero, and to acquaint him with the death of the Duke of, * * *. The Count, who still retained all his animosity against Dauvert, made some very strong remarks on the manner in which both he and his wife had beset the old nobleman during the few last days of his life. This Minister, and profound statesman, so admirable a judge of character, and a man of such penetration, had suffered himself to be kept by them quite to themselves. During the last visit he had paid him, Dharville perceived that he was entirely under

the guidance of the subtle, wheedling, Dauvert. When informed of the illness of their wealthy relative, many of the collateral branches of the family had hastened to Paris, for the purpose of visiting him; but Dauvert and his wife were jailors not accessible to bribes, and refused them admittance, nor would they suffer any one to approach the dying ex-minister. Some, therefore, took the resolution of addressing him by letter; they had, however, no doubt but that their letters also were intercepted, and that there was a will cutting them off from the property; for it was reported that a few days before his decease the Duke had desired a notary to be summoned. All the relatives were loud in their complaints and invectives against Dauvert. "Between ourselves," added Dharville, "if I may depend upon what I have heard from the Duke himself relative to them, they are all mercenary people, gaping after his money, and without any claims

on his kindness: they are all of them, besides, very rich—more so than they deserve to be. I am not at all sorry, therefore, if they are cut off from the property; but I should, I must confess, be extremely so were it to come into the hands of that plotting sycophant, Dauvert." George expressed his regret at hearing of the Duke's death, notwithstanding that he could not consider himself as having been altogether well treated by him: he then endeavoured to persuade his friend to cherish no resentment towards Dauvert, assuring him that he himself entertained none.

The Duke was buried in the most splendid manner; and a few days afterwards George received a letter from the deceased nobleman's notary, informing him that the Duke had left instructions for him to summon to the reading of the will all his relations who might happen to be at Paris, and some other individuals whom he named, among which

names was that of M. George Dercy; and that in consequence he requested that he would call upon him at ten o'clock that morning. George was astonished at receiving such a letter, but imagined that the Duke might have been anxious to make him forget his former cold treatment and neglect, by leaving him some small mark of his esteem; an attention with which he was much touched.

When Dercy arrived at the notary's he found a great many persons already assembled there, namely, M. Dauvert, an old steward, and an old housekeeper of the Duke's, and all that nobleman's relations. These latter had flocked thither from the north and from the south: there were great-nephews and great-nieces, and cousins of almost every degree and shade of consanguinity; there were old and young, city folks, and country folks; two ancient ladies were there on their own account, and there were husbands

come on the part of their wives, and proxies for those who could not attend personally. Among this host of relations the most important and conspicuous personage was a certain Viscount Darbolin, from Anjou, a very distant relative of the late Duke's, and a well-known character about the country where he resided for his fondness for litigation and law-suits—for sticking at nothing so that he could but attain his ends! During the revolution he neither emigrated, fought in La Vendee, nor joined himself with those nobles who thought that they were called upon to sacrifice their old prejudices in favour of reason and their country. He had on the contrary been one of those who either out of fear or from interest had taken a lead among the revolutionists ; and imagining that they ought to make a parade of their civism, had proceeded to greater extremities than the most fanatic of the Jacobins. This, however, had not prevented M. Darbolin from hoisting mo-

narchical colours at the restoration of Louis, with a kind of frenzy; nor from becoming the persecutor of the former patriots; and as he was very wealthy and a man of great influence all over the country where he resided, no one, dared to recal to his recollection his conduct during the year 1793.

All these relations had received the same invitation as George; for it seemed that the Duke was determined to exhibit after death that spirit of raillery which had characterised him throughout the whole of his life, in thus causing to be summoned to the reading of his will all those relations whom he most probably disinherited. Every one was full of anxiety and curiosity, which they endeavoured to conceal under an air of seriousness and gravity. M. Dauvert seemed to take upon himself to receive the visitors, more than the notary did: he was full of attentions to every one, particularly to the ladies; was assidu-

ous in offering seats to the company; and extolled the character of the deceased, at the same time raising his eyes to heaven; and then launched out into a brilliant eulogium on his genius, his extraordinary talents, and the important services he had rendered both his sovereign and the state. On perceiving George enter, he seemed greatly astonished; but after speaking a few words aside to the notary, he came up to him, and shook him cordially by the hand. "I am quite delighted to see you here, Dercy," cried he; "no doubt the worthy Duke, yielding to my representations in your favour, has been anxious to make amends for all his former neglect, by naming you in his will. Ah! I know his generous disposition perfectly well!"

The relations did not appear very grateful for the civilities tendered them by M. Dauvert, or rather they would have been very glad to have dispensed with both him and his attentions altogether.

"It is very fine truly for him," muttered one, "to pretend to behave so politely to people whom he is robbing of their just rights!"

"Yes," observed another; "but he was not quite so polite when he shut the door in our faces, and would not suffer us to see our relation."

M. Darbolin sate without saying a word; but with knitted brows, a scowling eye, and haughty lip, shot from time to time angry glances at Dauvert. All present, indeed, appeared to stand in mutual fear of each other, and to survey each other with looks of mistrust, even while exchanging salutations, renewing former acquaintances, or now forming new ones. There were many who had not met for a very long while, and there were others who now met for the first time in their lives. The old were surprised to find that they had so many young cousins; while the young could hardly conceive it possible

that so many of their old relations were still in existence.

The company now took their seats, George placed himself in a corner behind the rest, and M. Dauvert in the foremost rank, close by the notary. The latter began to read the will, which, in conformity with the law, had been previously opened at the *Tribunal de Premiere Instance.* Immediately the most hushed silence prevailed: the most fixed attention, and hope, and fear, were depicted in the attitude and expression of every one present; and M. Dauvert uttered a very audible sigh.

The first paragraphs contained only legacies, of greater or less value, to the domestics. "This is very well."—"Perfectly just."—"Quite as it should be," said the auditors. Next came some bequests to public charities. "What an excellent man!" cried Dauvert; yet some of his relations began to think that the late Duke had been too charitable. The

furniture was divided between the steward and the housekeeper, which drew down upon those individuals not the most pleasant looks from the two old ladies, whom we lately mentioned. The library was bequeathed to one of his Grace's secretaries, the pictures to another. "Diable!" cried one of his relations, "this is rather too much."

"At this rate we ourselves shall have nothing," said a second.

"There are only three more articles to read," observed the notary.

"Then make haste and let us hear them," cried M. Darbolin.

The notary looked again at the paper, and proceeded to read: "In gratitude for the attentions which Madame Dauvert has bestowed upon me during my illness, I request that she will accept a ring of the value of three thousand francs." Here Dauvert, who had alternately turned red and pale during the reading of the former articles, thought

proper to hold his handkerchief to his face. The notary continued: "I give and bequeath to each and every one of my relations, male or female, and of whatever degree of consanguinity, without any distinction—"

"Well?"

"What?"

"What does he give us?"

The notary proceeded,—"a ring of the value of a thousand francs." Here a general murmur of indignation burst from all the company; and some were not even sparing of their abuse. "The mean old curmudgeon!" exclaimed one. "I will not accept his paltry ring," cried another. One lady fanned herself tremendously; another had recourse to her salts.

At length the Viscount Darbolin called out to the notary: "Proceed, Sir,—the last article."

"Here it is," said the notary, and went on reading; "I name and appoint as my residuary legatee—"

"Here we have it."

"I was sure how it would be."

"Well, I shall not wear mourning."

"I have put it on, but shall lay it aside again directly."

The notary continued: "I name and appoint as my residuary legatee, on condition of his discharging all the preceding legacies—"

"Well, who is it?"

"Oh! no doubt but the very civil gentleman there."

"Yes, I suppose M. Dauvert."

"No," said the notary, "it is M. George Dercy."

"George!" exclaimed Dauvert, almost choked by his feelings.

"George Dercy!" cried every one else; "And who pray may this George Dercy be!"

The notary pointed him out with his hand.

"Yes, gentlemen," said George, rising from his corner, and advancing into the

middle of the room, "I am the person named."

The whole company, with the exception of Dauvert, pushed away their chairs in extreme ill-humour; and for several minutes all was confusion; at length the notary was able to make himself heard, when he said to George, "You doubtless accept of the legacy that is left you?"

"A moment if you please," returned he; then added, "it is necessary that I should reflect."

"Reflect!—Can he be possibly in his senses!"

"Oh! leave him alone: don't you see that 'tis mere affectation and grimace; but we are not to be so deceived."

"Aye, aye, he thinks to pass himself off for a very disinterested gentleman."

"The testament is null and void," cried the Viscount, "and I shall get it set aside."

All the relations now left the room, when Dauvert, advancing towards George, said in a tremulous and faltering voice, while the cold drops of perspiration stood on his forehead, and his face was deadly pale, "Receive my congratulations, M. Dercy, on your good fortune."

CHAP. V.

DIVERSITY OF OPINIONS RESPECTING GEORGE.

Whilst, in bestowing a new accession of wealth on our hero, fortune seemed as if determined to heap her favours on one who was so little solicitous to obtain them, the ungrateful goddess showed herself deaf to the prayers of two of her most constant worshippers—Doctor Saint Firmin and M. La Morinière. Their shares in the inheritance of the Ex-Jesuit daily diminished, and melted, if we may so say, in their hands. M. Saint Firmin always acted the man of importance; and although full of plots himself, was perpetually the dupe of those of other people, who led him to embark in schemes more pompous than lucrative. His extravagancies, his love of pleasure and

play, and his gambling speculations on 'Change, had reduced La Morinière to a still lower ebb than the Doctor: and then too, as if he had not already debts enough of his own, he had always some of his hopeful son's to pay, or else to settle, by means of his purse, some scrape or other in which the Captain's quarrelsome spirit had involved him, either at Paris or in his garrison. As for Dupré, he was very rich, or rather had a great deal of money; for can a man be said to be rich when he knows not how to enjoy what he possesses?

The report of George's being left the Duke's residuary legatee was not long in reaching the ears of his relations. La Morinière and Dupré hurried directly to his house; but not meeting with him at home they proceeded to the Doctor's, where they found Madame Saint Firmin alone, as her husband, equally anxious to see his nephew, was gone to call upon him. They hardly knew how to credit

this astonishing piece of news, till the Doctor, coming in shortly after, vouched for the truth of it.

"But how has he contrived," said Madame, "to induce this old Duke, with whom he seemed to keep up no acquaintance whatever, to leave him the bulk of his property?"

"Treat him like a simpleton now!" cried La Morinière; "or do you think that he has now shown himself sufficiently cunning?"

"Oh! 'tis a sly fellow after all!" observed the Doctor, somewhat enviously; "every thing that he engages in is sure to succeed, whilst I, who always act openly and candidly—" Then all of a sudden, changing his tone, and thinking, perhaps, to profit by his nephew's good fortune, he added, "however, I am really delighted that it has happened so; George has always been kind and obliging."

"Such a very excellent relation," add-

ed Madame, casting a significant glance at Dupré; "he is not like some persons I could name."

"'Tis very true," said La Morinière, casting in his turn a still more significant look at the quondam attorney; "George is not a miserly fellow, who would let his relations die without having the humanity to assist them."

Dupré, leaning back in an arm-chair, and absorbed in his own reflections, had hitherto been silent: "Well, good folks," said he, suddenly rising from his seat, "you first of all accuse George of being crafty and sly; then you commend his readiness to serve his relations; but you do not perceive the danger that I do; I fear very much that he will turn out to be the same simpleton he has ever been hitherto, and will be such a blockhead as to refuse this legacy."

"What!" cried La Morinière, "and do you imagine that people refuse such things as these?"

"He is capable of doing it: he is just the kind of character to compassionate the relatives of the Duke, and to imagine that it would be a sin to inherit a fortune at their expense."

"Ah! good heavens!" cried Madame Saint Firmin, "you do not say so?"

"I would venture to bet any thing that he will reject the legacy; nay, that he has rejected it already."

And the Doctor, calling to mind all the vexations that his nephew's delicacy and scrupulousness had, from time to time, occasioned him, participated in Dupré's apprehensions.

At this instant George made his appearance; for having been informed that his uncle had been to call upon him, he now came to see what was the reason of his visit. All rose on his entrance, and saluted him with great warmth, felicitating him on his great good luck.

"Would you believe it," said his uncle; "there are some people who wager that you will refuse this noble legacy?"

"Then those persons," returned George, "be they whosoever they may, deceive themselves very much. I have requested to be allowed to consider how I should act; I have reflected, and I shall accept it."

At this, an agreeable smile lighted up the countenances of all present. The *ci-devant* attorney more especially seemed overjoyed. "I must own to you," said he, "that what I had heard of your rejecting this property had filled me with a little alarm, but now I am quite easy again. I am anxious, too, my dear cousin, that you should enjoy this new fortune without any trouble to yourself; and I promise to manage it for you with as much care and conscientiousness as I do your present property."

"I am really much obliged to you," returned George, "but I want no agent to manage this new fortune for me. I even intend to take into my own hands that which I have hitherto committed to your care."

"Oh! just as you please," cried Dupré, quite confounded.

The congratulations of his other relations became now more lively; and the ex-lawyer's mortification seemed only to increase their good humour.

"An ungrateful fellow!" muttered Dupré; "one can never have a moment's satisfaction with such a man:" and he soon after departed.

George too did not remain long after him, pleading, as his excuse, the multiplicity of business in which this first accession of property involved him.

"Well," cried La Morinière, after he was gone; "was I not right? only see how knowing he is become!"

"To say the truth," said the Doctor, "he is not such a very great blockhead; and besides, he has an excellent heart."

"But, after all," they continually repeated, "how did he possibly contrive to stand so high in favour with the Duke!"

The very same day both the Doctor

and La Morinière saw George again; and both of them, although each proceeded in a different manner, made the same request, namely, that he would lend them money. He had often before assisted them, but this time he absolutely refused.

"How fortune hardens the heart!" said Saint Firmin.

"He is growing as great a niggard as Dupré," observed La Morinière.

The relations of the Duke spared neither complaints nor menaces towards Dercy; and the public, or rather those idle persons whom we term the public, were divided in their opinions with regard to this unexpected disposal of the late Minister's property. That class of people who are always struck with the merits of those who either are, or become rich, suddenly discovered in M. Dercy a number of noble and shining qualities, now that his fortune was on the point of being doubled. A still greater number of persons, tormented by envy, and always

looking upon whatever happens to the advantage of another as an injury towards themselves, blamed the will; and not a few, who would have gladly accepted such a legacy, and on such terms, pretended to be quite rigorists and jansenists in point of morality, and raised an outcry against George, declaring that it was absolutely scandalous that he should thus supplant the lawful heirs.

It was more particularly in the circles of Madame Dubrocard that this ultra-morality and delicacy was affected; and the sarcasms and cutting reflections thrown out against Dercy seemed intended to console the family for the disappointment they had experienced in the person of the amiable M. Dauvert. This latter gentleman affected to defend George's conduct, only that he might the more securely censure it. "Every one," said he, "is at liberty to follow his own inclinations. The Duke had the right to bequeath his property to whom

he pleased; and my friend Dercy has now the right to accept it. Persons of nobler and more generous spirit would, perhaps, have conceived it to be their duty to have refused such a legacy: George has chosen to act otherwise, but is he therefore to be reproached as if guilty of a crime?"

These noble sentiments of M. Dubrocard's son-in-law obtained great praise, and the commendations bestowed on them were in some degree a consolation to the family. Victorine said nothing, but she was grieved at the censures passed upon George's conduct. She had patiently endured to hear him treated as one ignorant of men and the world; but she could not so patiently endure to hear him reproached with being mercenary and void of delicacy. And she was too the more grieved because she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that there did appear to be some foundation for these censures.

She believed, as Dauvert had remarked, that George had not been guilty of any crime or any dishonesty; yet how little did his conduct on the present occasion appear to partake of that generosity which hitherto she had always fancied she had discovered in all Dercy's actions! What was become of that noble and high-minded integrity of which till now she had ever considered him to be an example?

The spring was now returned; and the very day before the reading of the will took place, Dharville, always eager after variety and novelty in his amusements, had set out for the seat which his father had in the vicinity of Havre. He had however, before he went, called upon George, when he said, "This is doubly good news for me; you are legatee, and Dauvert is not." The Dubrocards were again at their residence out of town, where on his first visit to them Dercy found a great deal

of company, and was received with great attention. Yet it was not long before certain ironical expressions found their way into the compliments that were paid him, to which he replied with an easy indifference: what gave him most pain was the cold and reserved behaviour of Victorine, in which it was impossible for him not to perceive that she was very dissatisfied with him. A walk was proposed in the garden, and this time chance favoured George: Victorine had separated from the rest of the company, and, without appearing to solicit her to walk with him, or to seek her out, he contrived to meet her in a retired part of the garden, where, finding they were free from all interruption, he said, "When I am certain, Mademoiselle, of the purity of my own intentions, the opinion of the world is indifferent to me; not so, however, your esteem, which is what I am of all

things on the earth the most anxious to obtain. It is this anxiety to secure your good opinion that induces me to confide to you an important secret, which, you will perceive, it is highly necessary should be for ever deposited in your own bosom. Read this letter of the late Duke of * * *, which I received the very day on which the will was read, and which was among a large bundle of other papers."

Without venturing to look at Dercy, Victorine took the letter with a trembling hand and read as follows:

"M. DERCY—If I rejected your services, it was because I could not overcome your delicate scruples of conscience. You resisted my offers when you were poor and unprovided for; and after you became rich you were equally inaccessible to the lures of ambition. ow, therefo re that I am on the point

of making my last will, it is to you— and to you alone that I wish to confide myself. I am not called upon to do any thing for my collateral relations, as they are all rich already, and most of them so through me: but I have a son of whose existence my family are entirely ignorant. It happens very unfortunately that the proofs of his being my son are so equivocal that the law gives him no right to my property, and at the same time it is not in my power to dispose of it in his favour. His mother, the unhappy victim of my passions, poor and without credit, and destitute of any influence either from her rank in society or her character, would be utterly unable to resist any manœuvres or legal institutions against her, on the part of my relations. I want, therefore, a man of probity, firmness, and discretion in whom I can confide: that man is yourself. And it is because I think

that you possess all these qualities that I make you my residuary legatee.

The Duke of * * *

Paris,
18th April, 18 * * "

On perusing the first lines of this epistle, Victorine had been visibly affected, but when she came to the end she could no longer restrain her tears, which flowed in abundance. "Ah! M. George," said she, "I see it all—no other explanation is necessary—Oh! how unjustly have I behaved towards you!—I have been able to conceive that you were mercenary, ungenerous! yes, you!—How well did the Duke know your character! Yes, you will fully justify the confidence he has reposed in you."

"I am very happy in being able to say that I have already partially done so. Having read over the documents accompanying the letter, I found that his Grace's ap-

prehensions were well founded; and I have therefore not hesitated to accept the property. Although I was once myself for a few months in an attorney's office, I am little acquainted with our civil laws, but I have not wished to consult them, fearing that I might meet with something that might alter my determination. I have learnt that this son, who is foreman in one of the principal manufactories at St. Quentin, has been in town for some days; and I have now seen him. He is a young man of a mild, unassuming, ingenuous disposition, well-educated, and a person of generous sentiments. I am already interested—very much interested in him, for he seems to live only for his mother, who has a sister with a large family; and Francis Leclercq, for such is the young man's name, would willingly assist all his mother's relations. We have already made all our arrangements: the Duke's fortune is entirely personal, and in cash,

he having just sold his last estate. As soon as the money comes into my hand, I shall purchase an estate for Leclercq, near Besançon, where he intends to establish a manufactory; for we have found that it will not be proper for him to remain where he has been known in such very different circumstances, as it would probably give rise to many idle suspicions. With what pleasure shall I learn that he makes a good use of a fortune of which I shall have been only the depository for a short time!"

Victorine had listened to Dercy with emotion and delight, and without taking her eyes from him; and when he had ceased speaking, she said: "Now, indeed, I see that generosity and delicacy which I expected to meet with in you; and all those virtues that have won my esteem—my entire affection."

"Your entire affection," cried George in a transport of joy! "Oh! repeat once

more those ecstatic sounds—sounds that fill my whole soul with rapture!"

He was kneeling at her feet, and pressed one of her hands to his lips; when frightened at his impetuous behaviour, and at the avowal that had just escaped her, Victorine intreated him to rise. "I wished," said she, "to conceal for ever within my own breast the sentiments with which you have inspired me; but I am frank, M. Dercy, and, since I have not been able to restrain an avowal, probably very indiscreet on my part, I will not now endeavour to recal it. Yes, you have long since had my esteem, my most tender esteem—yet why should I make this declaration to you? We shall never be united."

"What do you say?"

"You are wealthy, and I have nothing?"

"What an idea is this, and what an opinion must you entertain of me, if you imagine that fortune—"

"I intreat you not to interrupt, but listen to me; consider what is both your situation in life and my own: you would bestow on me a thousand advantages, and what could I bring you in return? I, a poor orphan, without a single friend, excepting my first guardian, an old man, whose infirmities and seclusion from the world have prevented his keeping me any longer under his roof:—I, who find myself almost a stranger in this family where I reside. Both your fortune and your abilities call upon you to play a brilliant part in the world: would you then act conformably to this destiny if you were to unite yourself to me? No; you must form an alliance that will connect you with a family of consequence; and I—I shall be happy—yes happy," added she with a sigh, "in seeing the man whom I should have preferred to any other in the whole world, enjoying the esteem of all ranks, and the well-earned gratitude of his

fellow-creatures. Do not tell me that my scruples are carried to a ridiculous excess; one day you will acknowledge the justness of my sentiments: as to myself, I do not speak lightly, but have long and maturely reflected upon what I now say. If, therefore, you desire not to distress me, do not any more speak to me of your love."

"What! never speak to you of the passion I feel for you; when so much candour, disinterestedness, and generosity, only add to its force!"

He then vowed that he would never cease to love her; accused her of cruelty and tyranny; and intreated her to abjure the fatal resolution she had made. But they were now obliged to break off their conversation, as the company approached them. During his ride back to town, Dercy was agitated with the most conflicting feelings; for while he was in rapture at the avowal Victorine had

made, he was beyond measure distressed at her refusing to bestow upon him her hand: but he still hoped to be able to overcome her resistance to his wishes.

CHAP. VI.

A CONTRIVANCE.

TWICE afterwards did George renew his entreaties to Victorine, but without any better success. Even the multiplicity of business in which the interests of Leclercq involved him, served but in a very small degree to divert his thoughts from this subject. "By what means," said he, "can I hope to overcome these repeated denials? What! have I more than once been able to invent expedients to serve my friends, or even indifferent persons, and shall I not be able now to find any, when I want to employ them for myself? Yet what do I say, is it my own happiness alone that is now at stake? No; the avowal that I have heard from her own lips assures me that

Victorine participates my love, and that if we are separated, she will be unhappy —a thousand times less so than myself; but still unhappy. No; for her own sake it is necessary that she should yield to my solicitations!" This idea now took complete possession of him—namely, that Victorine's peace of mind absolutely required that she should become his. In reflecting upon the disclosures that Madame Deschamps had made to him, relative to her pupil's family, a scheme struck him, the success of which appeared to him quite certain; and a few minutes' reflection determined him to adopt it. He therefore planned at once how he should proceed; and, having first made some calls that were indispensable, he immediately left Paris, and set out for the village where M. Belmont, Victorine's great uncle, resided.

Almost at the very moment that he was stepping into the carriage that was to take him there, he received a formal

notice on the part of the Viscount Darbolin, and the other relatives of the Duke, informing him that on grounds of nullity which would afterwards be brought forward, he was summoned to render up the property which he inherited as residuary legatee. This commencement of proceedings against him he considered only as the effects of ill-advised enmity, and having put the affair into the hands of his solicitor, who was of opinion that there was no reason for apprehension on his part, he thought only of his journey, and of Victorine.

The evening of the following day he reached the parsonage house, and was shown into a small and meanly furnished room, where he saw sitting in an arm-chair, a paralytic old man, who was in the last extremity of decrepitude, so much so, that he appeared more like a dead than a living man, seeming scarcely to be able to breathe; yet the expression of his countenance was placid and

agreeable. Dercy introduced himself, and in the most respectful manner begged pardon for intruding on him. The venerable old man rising from his seat with difficulty, and casting on George an affectionate look, said, "You are not entirely unknown to me, M. Dercy. You are, I believe, a frequent visitor at my niece's, Madame Dubrocard?" Having received a reply in the affirmative, he continued, "my great-niece, my dear Victorine Lorsay who lives with M. Dubrocard, has often mentioned you in her letters to me, and always in terms of the highest regard. She entertains a great esteem for you, and although the dear child is yet very young, I can rely on her judgment and her excellent heart: her intelligence is far superior to her years."

"She has then spoke to you of me?" enquired George, whose heart fluttered with joy at this intelligence, which appeared to him a most favourable omen.

"Your niece," continued he to M. Belmont, "is exceedingly kind; she judges of me, I fear, too favourably!" Then launching out in an animated tone in praises of Victorine, he said, "Ah! Sir, how could you prevail on yourself to part with such an angelic creature?"

"Your question, Sir, calls to my recollection one of the most painful and distressing events of my life," said the old man; and then after a short pause he proceeded to make inquiries after every individual of the family.

George furnished him with all the information it was in his power to give; and he then returned to the subject of Victorine.

"She was a charming, interesting little creature," said the venerable Curé, "at the time when circumstances compelled her to leave her poor old uncle. Dear child! she was most affectionately attached to me, and when she departed from hence I was nearly heart-broken

Shall I speak candidly with you, M. Dercy—yes, your countenance, the tone of your voice, and the character I have received of you from my niece, all assure me that I may unbosom myself to you without reserve. The only affliction that I feel it difficult to endure with resignation, is the apprehension I feel that my amiable, my excellent Victorine, does not meet with all those attentions, and all affection to which she is so justly entitled. Not that she makes any complaint to me, but in expressing her gratitude towards her aunt, there is a want of that touching warmth in which a heart of such sensibility as hers would gladly indulge, and which would assure me of her happiness."

"Your surmises are but too true. I will not conceal the truth from you—your amiable niece, who is herself all sweetness and affection, does not find among her relations the tenderness of her former protector; and I deeply regret that such

is the case. Believe me, I would not distress you by acquainting you with it; but I trust that Mademoiselle Lorsay may yet become happy; and" continued he, fixing his eyes on the floor, "it is on this very account that I am come hither."

The old man's attention was greatly excited by these words: "Go on," said he, "I am impatient to hear what you have to propose."

George now ingenuously related his attachment to Victorine, and the excess of delicacy that had induced her to reject the offer of his hand.

"She rejects you, then," said the good Curé, after a pause of some moments: "if such be the case, I pity you, for I know my niece well: on these points her character resembles that of her mother. Since she is persuaded that she cannot accept your offer without subjecting herself to suspicion and reproach, I would not have you hope.

that you can change her resolution. No; you must renounce all idea of it."

"Renounce her! that is impossible. —Our destiny, Sir, is in your hands: I can point out the means of overcoming, or rather deceiving the dear girl's scruples. But these means—it depends upon you alone to employ them."

"Speak then with confidence. I feel my end approaching; and if, before I quit this life, I can secure the happiness of one so dear to me, believe me I shall die content."

"Deign to listen then to me with attention: Mademoiselle Lorsay's refusal arises entirely from her not being possessed of any fortune. Now from what I have been informed by Madame Deschamps, your niece's excellent gouvernante, the worthy M. Lorsay her father, confided a short time previous to his death—that is now about sixteen years ago, all his property, twenty thousand francs, to a friend of his, a M.

Kervon, the captain of the L'Orient privateer; of whom nothing has since been heard, so that very probably he has been lost at sea. Let us now suppose him to be alive, and to return home after an absence of sixteen years, and to bring back to our dear Victorine both the principal and interest of what he borrowed of her father. Now might not twenty thousand francs employed during so many years on such a speculation, where there are so many lucky hits to be made—may they not, I say, have realized two hundred thousand francs? This honest captain would, on landing at Havre, have hastened here to you as being the great-uncle and the guardian of his deceased friend's only child, and would have paid into your hands these two hundred thousand francs in good bills; after which he would have immediately set sail again on a fresh voyage. My dear and respectable Sir, let me conjure you by the welfare of

the lovely girl, whose interest you have so much at heart, to realize all that I have been just supposing. Persuade yourself that it has actually happened as I have related, or rather, let us make your niece believe that it has. I will put the money into your hands, and you will afterwards pay it to her. It will not be a very large fortune, but it will be such a one that Mademoiselle Lorsay can have no longer any pretext for withholding from me her hand. The secret will remain for ever buried in our bosoms; and you will have the satisfaction of having secured the felicity both of your niece and myself."

The old man was visibly affected by this proposal. "You deserve to be happy," said he, "and I too should most gladly confide to you my niece's destiny; but what you propose to me, M. Dercy, would be a falsehood."

George was for a moment greatly astonished at this reply, but, recovering himself, he endeavoured by all the ar-

guments, he could bring forward, to convince the old Curé, at the same time painting in lively colours the despair into which a refusal would plunge him, and again conjuring him, as he valued his Victorine's happiness and peace of mind, to yield to his entreaties.

"Not for the world," said the old man, "not even to save her life, would I advance a falsehood." And on Dercy's redoubling his prayers and entreaties, he placed his hand upon a bible that was on the table, and raising his eyes to heaven, said, "It is written: thou shalt not lie."

Quite ovewhelmed by so positive a denial, George scarcely listened to what M. Belmont said to him by way of consolation. In vain did the Curé endeavour to tranquillize him; in vain did he ask him to stay; convinced that no arguments could prevail upon the old man to alter his determination, he begged not to be detained, and departed in the utmost affliction. But, instead of returning to

Paris, he proceeded to the neighbourhood of Havre, close by the coast of Ingouville, to the place where Dharville was gone to enjoy the first arrival of spring.

During this short journey, Victorine's lover was buried in the most sorrowful reflections. "Have I then," said he, "no hope remaining of ever enjoying happiness in this world? Even the virtues of my fellow-creatures seem to conspire against me." When he arrived at Dharville's seat, he found him at table along with a numerous company of visitors, consisting of neighbouring country gentlemen of his own age, of merchants, and of nearly all the actors of the Havre theatre, there being no performance there that evening. Whilst as ambassador at a foreign court the Marquis supported with dignity the fatigues of etiquette, his son was enjoying himself in a round of pleasures and amusements at this delightful seat;

did honour to his Excellency's cellars; gave splendid dinners to every one around him, and made love to all the some Cauchoises. What a difference between the humble parsonage that George had just left, and the gay and brilliant residence where he now was.

On hearing his friend's name announced, Dharville, both delighted and surprized, rose hastily from the table, and, having embraced him, said, turning to his guests, "Permit me, ladies and gentlemen, to present to you my best and most intimate friend, M. Dercy, quite a philosopher, at your service; but still he has so many amiable qualities that I overlook and pardon his philosophy, and love him as if he was such another rattle-brained fellow as myself.—Here, let a knife and fork be laid this instant for M. Dercy. We were in want of you, George; and I hope that you will now give me a week, a fortnight, or even a month of your company. You cannot conceive how

much pleasure I promise myself at having you here among us at my father's seat."

In the midst of the general joy and gaiety of the company, the Count examined his friend with a lively interest, and was shocked to perceive that he was pale and out of spirits: he himself became more grave, and no longer laughed, except in a forced manner, and as if out complaisance to his company, and to do the honours of the entertainment.

As soon as they rose from table, Dharville left his other guests, either to walk, or to go to play, or to amuse themselves in whatever manner they chose; while he took George to the further end of the garden. "In the name of heaven, my good fellow," said he, "what has happened to you? you are so much altered that you alarm me."

Entreating his pardon for not having communicated the secret to him before, George owned that he had a serious attachment.

"Oh!" cried Dharville, "I might have guessed as much by your melancholy visage; but all my fears are now removed —I really imagined that some misfortune had happened to you. You know I have myself been in the same predicament twenty times, and have yet always completely recovered. Why, even now—for you must know that I have always some attachment on my hands, though, thank heaven, my love-fits take no effect either on my spirits or my health,—that pretty brunette whom you sat by at table—she is the first singer at the Havre théatre, and I am in love with her absolutely to distraction. Come, let us hear:—is it of the rigour or of the infidelity of your mistress that you have to complain? We will, in either case, soon make you forget it among us."

George was very painfully hurt at this levity from the Count, and at the tone in which it was uttered. "Even my best friend," said he, "even Dharville himself

does not understand me; but, on the contrary, distresses me: to whom then shall I turn for comfort?"

Taking him affectionately by the hand, the Count exclaimed: "George, I sincerely intreat you to pardon me: it was the farthest from my thoughts to occasion you any distress. Confound my giddy, rattling tongue, that runs away with me in this manner before I am aware of it. As if I ought not to know perfectly well that what causes only a light impression on such a wild fellow as myself, must make a profound and durable impression upon a man of your character, and one so accustomed to reflection. What merely amuses me, creates an intense interest in you; and that which is mere trifling to me, is a serious affair to yourself. Yet, relate to me the cause of your distress;—believe, I am worthy of the confidence I solicit; if not from the gravity of my character, at least from the warmth and

sincerity of my affection. I am not at all offended with you for not having unbosomed yourself to me before now; nor do I now ask you to do so, except that I may offer you whatever service and consolation may be in my power."

These expressions of sincere friendship poured balm into the wounded bosom of our hero. He communicated to his friend the whole story of his attachment to Victorine; to which the Count listened with increasing interest; and when he had finished, congratulated him upon having gained the affections of so truly amiable a girl as Mademoiselle Lorsay. Notwithstanding his gaiety and love of the world, Dharville entertained none of those foolish prejudices which would forbid a man in his friend's sphere of life from marrying a woman without either title or fortune; and he therefore sincerely pitied Dercy when he heard that Victorine refused to consent to their union out of a sentiment of exaggerated

delicacy, but one which served to render her still more worthy of admiration. When George finished his recital by informing him how the old Curé had refused to be accessary to a falsehood in order to promote the union of the two lovers, Dharville was in great wrath against M. Belmont. In his opinion such a scruple was excessively puerile and ridiculous, and was carried to a fanatical excess of virtue and piety, that put him quite out of patience.

"Do not blame this venerable old man," cried Dercy; "however I may grieve at his refusal, it does not render me unjust. I saw how much it cost him to make the sacrifice that duty requires of him. His rigid virtue has destroyed my only hope of happiness, but let us not therefore speak of him with disrespect."

"Folly! nonsensical prejudices! I myself can see as well as he, how a man ought to act in such a delicate and critical point. Is it not our first duty—that which is paramount to all others, to con-

tribute as far as it is in our power to the happiness of those around us! But this old priest, excellent as he may be in every other respect, violates this first of social duties, out of regard to that which commands us not to swerve from truth. But, I say, give me falsehood, when it can be of service to worthy people, and injure no one besides. Yet stay, stay," cried he, seizing with one hand that of George, and striking his forehead with the other; "What a lucky thought!"

"What is it?" asked Dercy, in a tone of impatient joy; "my dear friend, let me hear it at once."

"Well, know then—But, no, no; it will never do—And yet—have you the money by you that you intended to bestow on Victorine?"

"Yes, before I left Paris I obtained the whole sum; and I have got forty thousand francs in bank-notes, in this pocket-book, which I would have had M. Belmont take."

"Very well; then the most difficult part of the business is got over; the money is found. There will be a thousand ways of getting her to accept it, on whom you are so anxious to force it. Trust me with the pocket-book; and let me arrange my ideas clearly, before I communicate them to you. To-morrow I will inform you what they are. In the meanwhile let us return to the company, who will be impatient at our long absence; and beguile the tediousness of this evening by chatting with our pretty actresses."

Dharville and his friend now returned to the drawing-room, where they found all the company collected: some were playing at écarté, bouillotte, or billiards; others were amusing themselves with music, or engaged in conversation. Notwithstanding the hopes of success with regard to which his friend seemed so sanguine, George found it impossible to assume cheerfulness, or take any part in the

general gaiety that prevailed around him, and he therefore retired as soon as decency would permit.

On waking the following morning, he was informed that the Count had set out on a journey, in the course of the night; and a billet was put into his hands couched in these terms:

"MY DEAR FRIEND—The plan I have contrived for you is a most admirable one, and sure of succeeding. But I have determined upon accomplishing it at once, without waiting to acquaint you with it; for you are really such a good, simple creature, that you would start a thousand objections. I am going to set out directly for Paris; do you follow me within a few hours. I have got your forty thousand francs, and as soon as you reach town you shall learn what an excellent purpose I am now going to put them to."

Quite astonished, and unable to divine what it could be that his friend intended to do, and agitated between a variety of hopes and fears, Dercy set off almost directly for the capital.

CHAP. VII.

DHARVILLE'S GIDDINESS—DERCY'S SIMPLICITY.

"Victory! victory!" exclaimed Dharville, as soon as he saw his friend: "She is yours—your own—you may now show yourself wherever you please, for she believes that she has a fortune of two hundred thousand francs."

"Is it possible? and dare I venture to trust my ears? How have you managed it? what have you been doing?"

"What have I been doing?—Miracles! my dear fellow; miracles! The instant I got here, I dispatched a servant to M. Dubrocard's with a note requesting an interview immediately, on business of importance to his family, particularly to his niece, Mademoiselle Lorsay: and I

was soon afterwards with them.—Indeed, George, but your Victorine is a most charming and amiable creature!—Well, I lost no time in coming to the point. I informed them that I was just arrived from Normandy, which you know was the fact: that I had been to call upon the worthy M. Belmont, whom I had found in the greatest joy at an event that would contribute materially to the happiness of his dear niece, having the very evening before seen an old friend of her father's, Captain Kervon, of the l'Orient privateer, who had informed him, that the twenty thousand francs, invested sixteen years ago, in that vessel, had produced two hundred thousand: in short, I related them the whole history just as you yourself told it to me; which, by the bye, is an admirably well contrived one. The worthy Curé, I added, having heard that it was my intention to go to Paris the next day, had requested me to be the bearer of this joyful intelligence,

and at the same time to place in his niece's hands forty thousand francs, and say that she should soon receive the remainder. I then took the notes out of the pocket-book, in corroboration of the truth of what I had said; for how is it possible to question the truth of a man's story, when he backs it by giving up such very tangible proofs of his sincerity? You should have seen the astonishment of every one of them, particularly the Receiver-General! Vexation and envy were plainly discoverable through their affected joy and sensibility. But Victorine! Oh! how charming! how interesting did she look, when she heard this intelligence. She looked down, blushed, and endeavoured to appear indifferent at receiving this extraordinary news; and yet I could perceive that she was not at all sorry at this sudden accession of fortune —you understand why? Ah! Dercy, but you are to be envied! As for myself, I told my tale with such an air of

easy gravity that it was absolutely impossible to doubt the truth of it: especially when I showed the forty thousand francs. I do really believe that in diplomatic talent, I should not be much behind my good father himself. And then I drew such an affecting portrait of the venerable Curé,—said that he was quite worn down by age and infirmity, and yet in excellent spirits, in consequence of the good fortune of his dear Victorine. I even gave them word for word all that he had said, not forgetting to throw in every now and then some text from the Bible, just as if I had heard them from his own mouth. Nor did I omit to add some reflections of my own, which, to say the truth, did me great credit. While all the time the Dubrocard's looked!—Oh! you should have seen them! However, to cut my story short, I presented the pocket-book to Mademoiselle Lorsay, who, receiving it with most winning grace, put it into her

uncle's hands. To say the truth, George, your mistress is such an angelic captivating creature, that I should feel tempted to become your rival myself, were I not your confidant. I counted over the notes, I saw them counted over again by M. Dubrocard; and here is his receipt."

During the whole of this speech, George had been in the utmost uneasiness. "What!" cried he, as soon as his friend had ceased; "have you dared then to deceive her—to make use of the name of the worthy Curé?"

"And why the deuce not? I have no foolish scruples of the kind; besides, what have I done more than what you yourself proposed to the timid old man?"

"Yes; but then it was with the hope that he would approve of it; that he would second me; but on the contrary, he blamed me, and would not hear of it at all."

"Well; well;" replied Dharville,

"the thing is now done, and 'tis to no purpose to try to undo it again." All that now remains is for you to finish what I have thus commenced. Take my advice, and do not lose an instant in seeing Mademoiselle Lorsay and her family."

"After all, since your stratagem has so far succeeded, there can be no harm in my carrying it on.—Yes; I will go directly."

Although not sorry that Victorine was thus put in possession of the money, his conscience reproached him for having had recourse to deceit; and he alternately thanked and found fault with Dharville for what he had done: at length he made up his mind, and drove off to M. Dubrocard's country-house.

On finding the drawing-room full of company, he felt rather embarrassed; nor was his embarrassment at all diminished when he understood on what occasion they were assembled. The news of

Victorine's sudden accession of fortune had soon spread abroad, and instantly almost all M. Dubrocard's acquaintance hurried to pay their congratulations and compliments to the young orphan whom before they could never see, or at least could see sit quite solitary in a corner of her aunt's drawing-room without offering to notice her. But now those who had before been most distant and haughty towards her, were the first to pay their homage. Victorine was not banished as formerly to a distant part of the room, but was seated between her aunt and cousin; the latter of whom seemed in raptures. "How happy I am now!" cried she at every compliment paid to Mademoiselle Lorsay. "It gives me the sincerest pleasure in the world," said M. Dauvert, "that the dear girl is now placed in a sphere to which she is entitled by her admirable qualities! I am quite in raptures," said he to Dercy, shaking him by the hand, as if the

Duke's will was no longer a weight at his heart: "Fortune seems to smile upon all those dear friends in whose welfare I feel so greatly interested." George at length recovered from the surprise into which he had been thrown, and paid his respects to Mademoiselle Lorsay with tolerable composure.

After some time the company began to sit down to cards; and Victorine, wearied with the formal compliments that had been paid, and to the ceremony to which she had been obliged to submit, begged her aunt to excuse her, and proceeded to the garden to indulge in her own reflections. George saw her quit the room with Madame Deschamps; and a few minutes afterwards, taking care not to be observed, he slipped out of the drawing-room, and followed her to the same solitary walk, where a few days before he had revealed to her the secret connected with the Duke's disposal of his property. "Mademoiselle," said he,

"will you give me leave to say that those obstacles which your delicacy before threw in the way of my happiness are now removed." The countenance of the lovely girl expressed a joy that she could not, nor attempted to, conceal. Madame Deschamps seated herself on a bench, and the two lovers walked on.

"It was here on this very spot, M. Dercy," replied Victorine, "that you confided to me an action that raises you greatly in my esteem, and that exposes you to the censures of the world; it was here that I learnt, to its full extent, the nobleness of your character, and the delicacy and generosity of your sentiments: now, therefore, that by happy and unexpected circumstances I find myself mistress of a fortune—I do not say equal to yours, but at least as much as I desire—I give you permission to ask my hand of M. Dubrocard."

This declaration, as affectionate as it was candid, ought to have overwhelmed

George with transport; yet, with what confusion did the praises he received from Victorine, fill him! Entertaining an innate horror of falsehood, and blushing to think that he was indebted for this consent from her whom he adored, only to a stratagem on his part, Dercy had the simplicity to acquaint her with the whole affair; related his proposal to M. Belmont, and how it had been rejected by the worthy Curé; and the bold and imprudent manner in which his friend Dharville had afterwards acted.

"Ah! gracious heaven!" cried Victorine, "then this fortune is not mine!—it comes from you—you force it upon me, and by means of a falsehood too!—It is you, who, notwithstanding the refusal of M. Belmont, have lent yourself to this trick!—What shame, what disgrace for me when this is known to the world!—Where shall I conceal myself?—How shall I act?—In whom shall I confide?—

O! my dear and venerable guardian, you alone could direct me in this perplexity, and you are far from me!—and your name has been used to authorize this stratagem!—ah! and you too I shall soon lose—I shall soon have to weep over your death." George here endeavoured to tranquillize her, and besought her pardon. "Leave me—avoid my sight," said she, "I reject your fatal present—I reject too your hand." She turned pale, her eyes rolled wildly, and she seemed about to faint, when Madame Deschamps approached; and Victorine, leaning upon her arm, immediately quitted the garden, and hurried to her apartment.

Dercy returned to town almost in a state of madness: he sought for Dharville every where, without being able to find him; and at length went home quite exhausted with fatigue. "This is the first time in my life," said he, "that I have had recourse to falsehood on my own account, and how soon have I had

occasion to repent it! I am cruelly punished for my error." Then having charged Joseph to go early the next morning to M. Dubrocard's, and to contrive to see Madame Deschamps, and inquire at what time he could have an terview with her, he retired, but not to rest;—for what a night of uneasiness did he pass!

The next day the morning was wearing fast away, but brought back no Joseph; and Dercy, no longer able to controul his impatience, was on the point of setting out himself, when his servant returned. But what were his feelings when he learnt that the gouvernante and her young charge had both left M. Dubrocard's early the preceding evening.

"How!" exclaimed George; "is she gone away?"

"Yes, sir, and in a very mysterious manner; no one of the servants knew any thing of their departure. They say that the young lady wrote to her uncle;

and it is very certain that M. Dubrocard entered his lady's department in evident uneasiness, with a letter in his hand; that he sent away the femme-de-chambre, and they remained a long time together. They afterwards sent off an express to town for their agent, who came, and after having been closetted a couple of hours with them, returned again in great haste to Paris What is beyond all doubt, is, that Mademoiselle Victorine is no longer at M. Dubrocard's; and that no one knows where she is gone."

"But I can guess—Yes, I am quite certain of it. Quick, quick, my good Joseph, and let me have horses and a post-chaise directly—I must set out this very instant. Yes," continued he, while his servants were busy in executing his commands, "'tis at St. Romain that I shall find her. It is beneath the roof of the venerable Curé, her uncle, that she has sought an asylum. The good old man has some regard for me;—he will

be touched by my penitence—he will assist me. O! my dear Victorine! I confess that I have been greatly to blame, but will you therefore be inflexible towards me? Had I been less fondly attached to you, I should have reflected better: had I entertained less horror of falsehood, I should have left you in the mistake under which you were. Was it not your refusal that at length compelled me to confide in my thoughtless, imprudent friend? O! fortune, how little reason have I to be grateful to you!—wherefoream I not poor? Victorine would then be mine."

Just as he was on the point of setting out on his journey, Dharville entered, quite out of breath: "Oh! confound it," exclaimed he, "this is quite a new vexation that I have to complain of. Hitherto I have always been plagued to find money: but I have this morning been tormented by a devil of a man, who has been absolutely compelling

me to take it,—M. Dubrocard's agent. He has returned me the forty thousand francs, with a very laconic note from the Receiver-General, wherein he informs me that the whole plot is discovered. I refused to take it back—became quite in a passion, and left the fellow on purpose to come hither to you.—Good God! what can have happened to overturn our plan?"

"Ah! my friend, my dear Dharville, I do not blame—I do not mean to accuse you, but what mischief have you not done me! She knows every thing—I have told her every thing—all is lost. She is gone away, and I am now going to endeavour to find her.—Yes, she is gone to the good Curé, her venerable uncle. Adieu, my friend; embrace me. Heaven grant that she may listen to my persuasions!" So saying, Dercy threw himself into his post-chaise; and the horses set off at a gallop. Dharville was quite confounded. "I had ma-

naged every thing so cleverly," said he, "and now he has been spoiling all. Ah! my poor friend, you are too candid—much too sincere ever to succeed in this world of ours."

During his journey Dercy was tormented by a thousand disquieting apprehensions. The one that disturbed him most was that he should be mistaken as to the place of Victorine's retreat. But no, he was not mistaken, for she had indeed left M. Dubrocard's for the purpose of seeking a refuge beneath the roof of her venerable relation. She arrived at St. Romain six hours before Dercy; but alas! it was only to witness the affliction that overwhelmed all the inhabitants of the village, who had just been paying the last duties to their revered pastor; and she was thus deprived of the consolation of receiving his last sighs. The unhappy girl fell into a deep melancholy; from which suddenly rousing herself, after a short

time, and collecting all her energies, she asked Madame Deschamps if she would consent to follow her. The old gouvernante replied that she would never desert her dear young mistress. When George reached the village Victorine had just left it, nor could any one inform him which road she had taken. This was a thunderbolt for our hero! "Whither is she gone?" cried he: "where shall I now seek her?" He then dispatched his trusty Joseph to Havre, and another messenger to Dieppe: but he was still irresolute what route he himself should take. It was in vain that he once more repeated all the questions he had before put to the people of the village. With what impatience did he await the return of his emissaries! Two days had already elapsed without bringing him any tidings of the lovely fugitive. Should he return to Paris, or proceed further? but in what direction should he pro-

ceed?—It was now that he abandoned himself to complete melancholy, and determined, should he not be able to discover Victorine, to quit the world altogether, and live in complete solitude.

On the third day he received a letter from Dharville, that compelled him to quit St. Romain without waiting any longer for the intelligence he was so anxious to obtain; for duty and honour summoned him to Paris.

CHAP. VIII.

PLOTS AND DANGERS.

During these two journeys into Normandy, and whilst he was entirely occupied with Victorine, plots of the most nefarious kind had been formed against Dercy.

From the very moment that Dauvert had met with his old school-fellow, with what ardour had he laid hold of him, surrounded him with his snares, and deceived him by a false show of friendship! But had he wished then to injure another? No, he had merely been anxious to serve his own ends; and had made use of George only as a tool with which to work out his own fortune. Yet ever since an object that he had had so greatly at heart had escaped him,

and had thrown itself, if we may so say, in the way of George, without his seeking it,—since the Duke of * * * had named the latter his residuary legatee, it was no longer only the desire of elevating or enriching himself that animated Dauvert, but pure enmity, and what we do not scruple to term a gratuitious malignity without any view of interest;—a spirit of vindictiveness, and a strong desire to injure a man who, he thought, had enriched himself at his expence: deplorable effect, or rather deplorable perversion of vile passions which degenerate from the love of one's-self into the hatred of one's neighbour.

As soon as they had been informed of the manner in which the Duke had disposed of his property, his relations had felt a great desire to get the will set aside? But how was this to be accomplished? They had taken the opinion of legal men; and had been encouraged to proceed in the attempt only

by those unprincipled practitioners who are justly scorned by the rest of the profession; who are regarded with abhorrence by all men of common honesty, and employed only by those who are as unprincipled as themselves; and who never fail to find substantial grounds for commencing an action, whatever be the business on which they are consulted; and uniformly advise their clients to go to law. These relations found a powerful auxiliary in the envious, vindictive Dauvert, who was now transformed from an intriguing into a malignant man. He who for several months past had been manœuvring to become legatee, and to supplant the heirs, now endeavoured to wrest the property from the legatee and to transfer it to the latter. He did not, however, carry on his machinations openly, for he would have blushed to show himself as the enemy of the man from whom he had received so many good offices. He held

therefore many private and confidential conferences with the Viscount Darbolin, who had formerly been as furious a Jacobin, as he was now a furious Ultra, and who had always been eager to engage in law-suits, and subtle and determined in carrying them on. At all these conferences was an old attorney, formerly a Procureur at the Châtelet, a man to whom chicanery was his proper element, out of which he could not breathe; and who was more attached to his profession as a means of gratifying his passions for litigation, than as a source of profit; and was absolutely in raptures whenever he could put into practice some new stroke in his profession.

In order to gain his ends it was necessary that Dauvert should confess both to the Viscount and the old lawyer, all his little artifices towards the Duke during his illness. "Yet I was far from wishing," said he, "to

deprive the legal heirs of their rights; but I did conceive that I might look to receive a handsome legacy, and it was in this view—which cannot justly be blamed by any one, that my wife and myself bestowed those constant attentions which have been malignantly termed a besieging his grace."

"Ah! you are a pretty rascal!" cried Darbolin, half angrily, half pleasantly, "So, you too were trying to wrong us? —however, no matter. Since neither you nor myself, nor any of the other relations have got any thing, we may as well be friends, and unite in order to revenge ourselves, and to endeavour to catch something if we can."

In the confessions which Dauvert now thought proper to make to his accomplices, he mentioned, that one day after the Duke had been some time confined by his illness his Grace said that he had a duty to fulfil, a debt that he wished to discharge, and that there he

suddenly stopped; but that this observation had not been thrown away upon a man of so much shrewdness as himself; in consequence of which he had replied: "Then your Grace ought to confide yourself to some friend on whose honour you can rely for the discharge of this duty." To this the Duke had made no reply, was silent for a few minutes, and then turned the conversation to some other subject. Since that nobleman's decease, and when he found that Dercy was left residuary legatee, he had frequently, he said, thought of this conversation, and he remembered that the very next day the Duke had sent for the notary and made his will.

"I have it," said the old lawyer, rising hastily from his seat; "I see now how the whole matter stands. What a sudden light now breaks in upon me! Do you know the meaning of a *Fidei-commissum*, or holding in trust for ano-

ther party? The code defines it in the clearest manner; yes," said he, suddenly turning over the *Cinq Codes* that was laying on his desk, "here we have it: Art. 896. 'Substitutions are expressly prohibited: all disposition of property by which the donee, the inheritor, or the legatee, is to hold such property for, and in trust for another, shall be null and void, even with regard to any such donee, inheritor, or legatee.'"

"I conceived as much," replied Dauvert, in evident perplexity.

"Now," continued the lawyer, "the case is plain enough. The Duke informed M. Dauvert that he had a duty to fulfil; and M. Dauvert hinted that it was proper that he should confide himself to some honourable and trust-worthy person, which advice, it seems, he reflected upon, and the next day sent for his notary. Now, is it not probable, or rather, is it not evident, that the Duke named M. George Dercy, as his residu-

ary legatee, considering him—although they were then on no very good terms, as more a man of probity, and more to be depended upon than the said M. Dauvert? I do not mean to offend, but merely to state what I conceive to have been the opinion of the deceased nobleman."

"Confusion seize it," cried Dauvert, "and can it then be possible that I who have hitherto always managed this Dercy to serve my own purposes, and found my own account in his disinterestedness—is it possible, that in this last and most important point of all, I should, by my insinuations, have turned affairs to his advantage and my own prejudice?"

"Exactly so," said the malicious lawyer; "there is no doubt but that, while you intended to give a hint in your own favour, you put the Duke in mind of this M. Dercy."

Darbolin said nothing, but he silently enjoyed Dauvert's rage and mortifica-

tion. "Yes, yes, I remember now perfectly well," continued Dauvert, "that even while the Duke availed himself of that submission and docility on my part, which obtained me his favour, he used to rally me sometimes without mercy, and that he could never refuse esteeming this poor creature, Dercy, whose extreme delicacy and inflexible integrity obtained for him the forfeiture of his Grace's favour, and the loss of his place."

"And then," interrupted the lawyer, "when the Duke found that he was going to die, and that he would no longer be any thing either in the State, or even in this world, he thought that he was most likely to find the probity and honour that he was seeking for, in the man whom he had slighted, than in the assiduous, submissive, pliant creatures, whose services he had deigned to make use of during his life; don't imagine that I wish to hurt your feelings,

M. Dauvert, but this is no time to mince the matter with you; you will, therefore, excuse my plain speaking. Granting such to have been the case," added he, raising his voice, "does it not become more than probable that—is it not evident, that the bulk of the property has been left to this George Dercy, only to be held by him in trust for another party, to whom, from some circumstances or other, the Duke was hindered from bequeathing it directly? Now this is what constitutes what we lawyers term a real *fidei-commission* which is strictly forbidden by the Roman law, by the ancient legal usages of Paris, and also by the new code, as I have just proved to you, by quoting the article on the subject."

"Consequently," cried the Viscount, "the testament becomes null and void, and we have sufficient grounds for carrying the matter into a court of justice."

"Even so," cried the attorney: "but in whose favour is this fidei commission?

This is a point which we must know, and which it will be indispensable for us to prove: for on what shall we be able to found our action, if we have not a proof, something wearing the appearance of a proof, or some allegation to bring forward. We must here have something more than mere conjecture; for we shall have to do with scrupulous magistrates who regard the execution of such a trust as a merit, and who would therefore, apply the law against it with regret."

It was then determined on between these three worthies, that they should go and attempt to discover some clue so as to get into the track of the business; either in carefully examining all the actions of the Duke's life, in order to see whether there was any one to whom he might be under particular obligations, or in watching over George's conduct to find out whether he should transfer the property to another. All their in-

quiries, however, led to nothing, for they could gain no satisfactory information relative to the Duke's private actions; and Dercy had been so circumspect relative to his conferences with that nobleman's son, that these investigators neither discovered nor even suspected any thing of the truth.

Not being able therefore to substantiate a *fidei-commission*, or allege any grounds for supposing that there was one, the Viscount, his adviser the old lawyer, and the rest of the Duke's relations, resolved to try to set aside that part of the will relative to the residuary-legatee-ship, on the score of unfair influence on the part of the legatee; intending to avail themselves of any circumstances that might arise in the course of the proceedings to alter the form and plan of their attack. The old solicitor undertook upon himself to prove the numerous manœuvres employed by George, for the purpose of influencing and seducing the

testator; for he adopted the doctrine of the Judge who, proud of his ability in finding culprits guilty, said, "Bring me two lines written by the honestest man that ever existed, and I will engage that they shall be sufficient to hang him." He talked of instituting an investigation into the will, and seeing what could be done by complaisant witnesses. The only time that George had seen the Duke since he had been dismissed by him, was on the day of Dauvert's marriage, and then he had not spoken to him; yet what did this signify, if people could be found who would come forward and swear that he had spoken to him, that he had seen him at other times, and that very frequently? This would, at least, create much noise; the legatee would be terrified, and, in order to avoid further attacks on his character, would probably give up his claim. To these proposals the Viscount assented with a smile of approbation; but Dauvert was, at first, alarmed when

he found how far it was intended to push things against Dercy; yet he was now launched in the business, it was too late to think of receding, and his hatred and envy soon silenced his remorse.

It was then that the Duke's relations, with M. Darbolin at their head, had commenced their attacks. Subsequently to the summons that had been sent to George just as he was on the point of setting out for St. Romain, many other papers had been addressed to him. Intent only on finding Victorine, relying upon his innocence, and conceiving that the proceedings against him were too preposterous ever to succeed, he had contented himself with leaving the business entirely to his solicitor, and to a clever counsel, recommended to him by the former. The relations had indirectly made offers of accommodation that were rejected; but they employed other means by which they hoped to attain their object.

The issue of a suit intended to set

aside a will on the grounds of illegal and undue influence employed on the part of the legatee, depends very considerably on the good or bad character of the party accused of having employed captation against the testator. George's conduct was such as ought to have obtained for him the best of characters, but he was unfortunately one of that small class of mankind who think more of their conscience than of their reputation. And although, with the exception of Darbolin, and the other relatives of the Duke, and his worthy friend Dauvert, he had no positive enemies, there are always at Paris a number of persons disposed to enjoy any misfortune that may happen to any one and even to contribute to it. By his behaviour at the recent elections he had offended all parties, and disadvantageous reports and prejudices began to be excited against him. He was already rich, and was now become more so by this new accession of property, so far the

world was ready to flatter and court him; but then his scrupulousness on all matters of conscience, that was considered as being carried to a ridiculous excess, and his extraordinary probity gave mortal offence to all those who thought that such integrity was a tacit reproach on their own laxity of principle; and these, it will readily be conceived, were a very formidable majority. Dauvert, who had now overcome the repugnance he at first felt, and entered into the plans of the heirs-at-law, omitted no opportunity of creating unfavourable feelings towards Dercy. He conceived that one of the surest ways of getting a man decried by the public was to have him decried by his own family; for when our own relations and friends—those who are bound to us by the ties of blood, accuse us, instead of taking our part, what is to hinder the public, to whom we are quite indifferent, from giving credit to the accusations alleged against us. It was

with these views that the worthy Dauvert went to find out one of our hero's cousins, M. Dupré, who was also his man of business.

Dupré was quite irritated against George ever since the latter had announced to him his intention of taking the management of his property out of his hands; so that he was in the best disposition that could be for Dauvert's views. That amiable individual assigned as the reason of this visit the interest he felt in George's affairs. "This business of the will," said he, "may turn out very much to the prejudice of my good friend Dercy, more especially as the sums he is in the habit of expending in private, and the debts he is known to have contracted, cause him to be looked upon as a spendthrift. I have not wished," continued he, "to say a word on this subject either to his other cousin, or to his uncle, for are not they quite as thoughtless and improvident as himself? It is only to a pru-

dent and discreet person like yourself, my good sir, that I conceive I can speak on such a subject and communicate the apprehensions I entertain without incurring ridicule." Dupré seemed to feel all the force of the compliment implied. "Would it not be possible," continued Dauvert, "to save both the reputation and the fortune of your relative? for they are both at stake."

"As to his reputation," replied the other, "that I consider as already lost; and, with regard to his fortune, I certainly consider it in a very perilous situation if he has the management of it."

"Would it not be possible then, for you to retain the management of it in your own hands? Not that I advise you to take out an act of lunacy against him—"

These last words produced an instantaneous and almost magical effect upon the person to whom they were addressed. "And wherefore not," cried he suddenly, "there is many a person put under a

statute of lunacy who deserve it much less than George Dercy." And then, as familiar with the code as the Viscount's old lawyer, he quoted: "'Any person no longer in his minority or nonage, yet of unsound mind, affected with continual mental weakness, imbecility, or insanity, is to be put under a statute of lunacy.'—Insane?—no, he is not to be sure exactly what is termed insane, but then the poor fellow has always been half an idiot—yes, even from his very birth."

When he perceived with what eagerness M. Dupré had laid hold of the hint just thrown out by him, and that he was prepared to act upon it, Dauvert felt another twinge of conscience, but this was as soon quieted as the former one had been. From a feeling of false shame, the shame of acknowledging an error, and that weakness, unfortunately too common, that hinders us from yielding to our better impulses, and also from hatred and envy towards Dercy, he made

no objection to this nefarious proposal, nor said a syllable to dissuade him from it.

"In fact," said Dupré, "if the question was only to obtain a statute of lunacy, both my uncle and my cousin La Morinière would deserve one as well as George. But it is the latter that we must begin with; besides, neither of the others has now hardly any thing left; of what use, therefore, can it be to interpose in their behalf? But this poor fellow George!—and 'tis for his interest, not for our own, that we proceed thus against him. I do not know whether we shall succeed; however, we can but try—and the two others, I am quite sure, will assist us, as far as in their power."

These two others, in fact, had never forgiven George for having refused to lend them money; and the Doctor had, moreover, much to complain of with respect to the elections. Neither of them, therefore, it was probable would object to enter into Dupré's views

whenever he should speak to them on the subject. That very same day, they heard of the manner in which George had been endeavouring to make Victorine believe, that she had a fortune of two hundred thousand francs; and Dupré then recollected that Dercy had applied to him for money, and that he had probably obtained it elsewhere, to discharge the play-debts that his friend Dharville had contracted at Aix-la-Chapelle. "At any rate," said he, "I will prepare a petition to have George's affairs put under a commission of lunacy. There can be no doubt of his being insane: what more proof of it is required? Here does this thoughtless, extravagant fellow go and lend to a man as extravagant as himself, two hundred louis; and, as if this was not enough, he has the madness to insist upon a girl's accepting from him two hundred, three hundred thousand francs!"

We thus see that our hero was fallen

into the clutches of two worthies of the law, of the true harpy breed,—the old solicitor, and the *ci-devant* attorney. The former, who was the guide and adviser of the Duke's relations, attacked him out of mercenary motives; while his cousin, anxious to retain the admininistration of his property in his own hands, joined with the rest of his family to institute legal proceedings against him as a person of unsound mind: the one would prosecute him as a crafty knave who had defrauded the legal heirs of the deceased minister; the other would have him treated as a man of such weak intellect that he was utterly unfit to be trusted with the care of his fortune. Some of our readers will perhaps recollect the anecdote of the man who was accused before two different tribunals, on totally opposite grounds. In one court a woman brought a suit of affiliation against him for an illegitimate child, in another his

wife sought to be divorced from him on the plea of insufficiency. This being the case, he thought that he could defend himself exceedingly well against both charges by playing off the one against the other; but he was, notwithstanding, nonsuited in both instances. Dercy was in pretty nearly such a situation as this good man, being attacked at the same instant by two very contradictory accusations. His relations did not deny that he was mercenary, nor did the other party deny that he was extravagant; and both agreed in one respect —namely, that he was mercenary in order to be prodigal: without withdrawing the charge against him of being a man of unsound intellect, they accused him of having unfairly taken advantage of the Duke's weakness; they accused him of attachment to play, and of squandering away his money.

The clamours of the heirs-at-law, the murmurs of a number of people insti-

gated by them, and the complaints of his own relations, had excited a powerful feeling against Dercy in the public mind: he was malignantly attacked and calumniated by all the scandal-mongers, destroyers of character, and idle tale-bearers in the capital. Many paragraphs full of bitter personality had already appeared against him in some of those journals which offer to the Moloch part of the public the sacrifice of living reputations, and the scribblers in which hire out their assassin pens to any of those good Christians who are desirous of stabbing the character of a neighbour. These papers abuse any body or every body, it matters not whom, so that they be but paid for their nefarious work, and can pamper the depraved appetite of their readers, for scandal.

The manner in which Victorine had disappeared, and the sudden absence of George immediately afterwards, had

opened a fresh field for malicious conjecture; a thousand various reports were soon in circulation, in which Victorine was not spared any more than Dercy. It was confidently affirmed that she was gone off with him; other reports stated that George had forcibly carried her away; and some of those good people who on such occasions give the rein to their imaginations, were perfectly *au fait* as to the most minute particulars—had seen some one who had seen the parties step into a carriage together,—could describe the young lady's dress, and knew all those other minute details which are so particularly interesting to the public in similar stories. M. Dubrocard, his wife, and Madame Dauvert, who had not forgotten that George had slighted her hand, all represented Victorine as an ungrateful girl whom they abandoned to her unhappy fate; and of whom they wished to hear no more: at other times they

talked of proceeding legally against George. Threatened on one hand with a statute of lunacy, on the other with an inquiry to prove that he had illegally and nefariously induced the Duke to appoint him his heir to the exclusion of that nobleman's relatives, he might, had but M. Dubrocard had some adviser or agent as ingenious as the other two worthies of the law, have had a suit of abduction instituted against him.

In the midst of all these perils, and the numerous foes drawn up in array against him, he had one friend—Dharville, who, seriously alarmed by what he heard, wrote to Dercy to request him to return to Paris immediately.

CHAP. IX.

LAW PROCEEDINGS.

The pressing and ambiguous terms in which Dharville's letter was couched, added to the distress which George had before felt in consequence of his ignorance of the place of Victorine's retreat. Instead of driving to his own house, he ordered the postillion to proceed directly to that of his friend, whom he found then reading a statement or *Memoire* against him that had been just published by one of the relatives of the Duke.

This bulky pamphlet was a dreadfully violent libel, a tissue of baseless suppositions and coarse calumnies, in which George was represented as a crafty mercenary hypocrite who had stuck at

nothing in order to defraud the rightful heirs of the Duke's property. The security of families, it was said, absolutely required that a stop should be put to such abuses. On the other hand, in favour of the relations, there was an abundance of fine sentimental writing, rhetorical flourishes, eloquently-turned periods, and all that pomp of common-place morality, often destitute of sense, but always high-flown and sonorous—which has long been so successfully employed in the pulpit, at the bar, in journals and novels, and which our pleaders never fail to employ whenever they have a bad cause to defend. It was in romantic language—for this language has now found its way even into our courts of law—that George was denounced as an unprincipled wretch who had defrauded others of their just rights; and the poor heirs-at-law, especially the amiable Viscount, were held up to public sympathy as so many

saints, victims, and martyrs. This publication had been distributed at coffee-houses, reading-rooms, and at the entrances and lobbies of the different theatres, and sent to every one of George's acquaintance; yet after all, this was but a mere prelude—a signal for attack, which was threatened in the shape of a second, or even a third, pamphlet.

At the sight of Dercy, Dharville experienced a variety of contrary feelings: he hastened to welcome him back, and felt as if relieved by his return, while he at the same time was alarmed on his account at the mass of calumny and enmity that had been raised up against him. He spoke to him of the libellous statement we have just noticed, and yet, fearful of distressing him, he did not wish that he should notice it. "In order that I may be able to reply to it, is it not necessary that I should first read it?" inquired George, who, as it not unfre-

quently happens in such cases, became tranquil when he found that his friend was more agitated and distressed than himself. He ran over the 'Statement of Facts,' and then very composedly said: "In the midst of all this abuse and declamation, I see nothing but allegations and falsehoods impossible to be proved."

"Still the world," replied Dharville, "will credit it all. You cannot conceive how prejudiced the public mind is against you; and what distresses me beyond measure is, that no one will listen to what I have to advance in your defence. When I begin to plead your cause, and to vow that my friend Dercy is a man of the strictest probity and the nicest honour, 'This is all very well;' they reply, with a smile expressive of malice against you, and of a compassion towards me—'This is all very well; we know perfectly what a good-natured, easy fellow you are, Dharville: but

you are too unthinking not to be imposed upon by the parade of fine sentiments and virtuous appearances.' Your conduct is not such as to induce us to give implicit credit to all that you choose to believe!' Ah! my friend, I am now severely punished for my past levity and indiscretion. What a lesson is this for me! Had I followed your advice, and been less wild and foolish, my testimony in your favour would have some weight."

George, who had appeared to Dharville to be but little concerned at his own dangers, was affected at the self-reproaches of his friend. Thanking him for the interest he took in his welfare, and then coming to things of more personal moment to himself, he said, "Of what importance to me is the opinion of the world? The testimony of my own conscience, your esteem, and Victorine's love, these are enough to satisfy all my wishes. But alas! she avoids me—flies from me."

"But what," said Dharville, "if even Victorine herself, she to whom you are so fondly attached, should not be spared by calumny?" He then proceeded to acquaint him with the reports to which his absence, and the young lady's flight, had given rise. On hearing this intelligence, the unfortunate Dercy was completely overwhelmed.

"What! how! she too—she who is all purity and virtue! who deserves the good word of every one—is not even she safe from the malignant censures of the world? Do those vile vermin dare to pollute with their filthy venom so fair and tender a flower? Was it not then enough for me to have to weep her loss? Oh! dear and unfortunate Victorine, into what an abyss of misery has your excessive delicacy plunged both me and yourself!"

"I conjure you, Dercy," said the Count, "that, if not for your own sake, that for hers, and for mine—for your dear

Victorine, and for your friend, you will defend yourself against these calumnies—will defend her whom you so tenderly love. Prove in the face of all the world, that probity which animates you, which is so honourable to you, and which renders me proud of calling you my friend."

"Yes, I will defend her," cried George, starting from the state of despair into which he had been thrown. "Because I am one who has shown himself regardless of all that constitutes the ambition of the great mass of mankind, they imagine that they may attack and trample upon me with impunity, that they may attack even her whom I love:—they are, however, deceived. But, in order to defend her, it is necessary that I should exculpate myself from the charges brought against me; it is necessary that my voice should be heard, which can only be done by my not suffering myself to be run down by such vile calumnious outcries as those

which have been set up against me. I will reply, and reply victoriously, to the statement put forth by my adversaries!"

Somewhat encouraged by this decisive energy on the part of his friend, Dharville urged him to take directly the legal advice of counsel as to the measures he ought to pursue. To this proposal Dercy acceded at once, and without going home to change his travelling dress, he hastened with Dharville to an advocate.

This advocate was as noted in the profession for his probity and excellent character, as for his legal knowledge and ability. He received George politely, but yet with a coolness and reserve that formed a striking contrast with the warmth with which Dharville began to speak, without farther introduction, of the calumnies propagated against Dercy —of the importance of losing no time in replying to them; and of proving to the world, the integrity, sincerity, and dis-

interestedness of his friend. At the word 'disinterestedness,' the barrister could hardly repress a smile, which, although not observed by the Count, did not escape the notice of George.

"My task," said the barrister, "is to prove that the will of the Duke is perfectly valid. This it will be very easy for me to do in a *Memoire*—a short statement of about four or five pages, that can be ready to-morrow. As to the rest, it remains with M. Dercy to prove that the imputations alleged against him are frivolous and vexatious."

"To prove it!" cried Dharville, with some vehemence; "we can both of us furnish you with proofs. Do you then publish your *Memoire* to-morrow; and since our adversaries threaten us with a second statement of facts, we too can give out that what we now do is only preparatory to a fuller justification, which will place the innocence of my friend beyond the least shadow of doubt;

and will cover his calumniators with confusion."

Dharville and George then took their leave of the counsellor, who lived in the neighbourhood of the Place Véndome; and Dharville, who now thought only of his friend, parted from him in order to call upon twenty different persons of his acquaintance, for the purpose of counteracting the effect of the calumnious statement that had gone forth; to inform them that it would be replied to forthwith; to speak warmly in Dercy's favour; and, if necessary, to challenge whoever should cast any imputation on his honour. George, being thus left alone, crossed the gardens of the Tuilleries.

It was an exceedingly fine spring morning, and the walks below the terrace of the Rue de Rivoli were crowded with company. In walking along George could not help reflecting upon the coolness with which the advocate had treated him, and the significant manner in which

he had smiled when Dharville uttered the word 'disinterestedness;' and he felt that this respectable lawyer, whilst he was convinced of the validity of the will, entertained no very flattering opinion of the legatee, or in other words he considered the cause to be more defensible than his client. Hitherto Dercy had frequently expressed his disregard of popular opinion, but he now felt how painful it is to be thought of contemptuously by a worthy man. A great many persons of his acquaintance were walking in the Tuilleries, and among them several ladies whom he recollected to have met at M. Dubrocard's, and other houses where he visited. Although busied in his own reflections, he perceived them; and seeing that he was recognised by them also, was about to approach and speak to them; how great then was his mortification, when he perceived that some of them turned aside to avoid meeting him, and that

others would not look at him. At any other time such a determination to avoid him would have caused him no vexation; but in the mood in which he now was, and attributing it to the rumours which were circulated against him, this direct cutting him was most painful to his feelings. "Capricious as you are in your judgments," said he, "and unjust as you are in your prejudices—and many of you so little able, perhaps, to bear a scrutiny into your own conduct, you still affect to despise others! Oh! how truly happy should I be to live at a distance from you all, could I but find my Victorine!"

He then hastened from the walks where it was now difficult for him to make his way, on account of the crowd; and having reached the terrace in front of the palace, he was still at some distance from the Pont Royal, when he perceived M. Dauvert, and his wife, step out of an elegant barouche. Not aware that Dercy

was returned to Paris, they were much astonished, and not very well pleased at seeing him; while George, knowing that it was they who were the authors of the malicious reports connected with Victorine's disappearance, was at first tempted to go up to them, and reproach them with their baseness towards the unfortunate girl. As he stood hesitating whether to do so or not, or whether he should merely salute Madame Dauvert in a distant manner, that lady settled the matter at once, by passing by him without deigning to notice him, affecting to look at some other object; and her husband was also too intent in speaking to her to perceive our hero. Thus then did the man who had so long forced himself upon George, in a manner that seemed almost persecution—who had continually importuned him with his perfidious show of friendship, seem now to avoid him as a contagion! He had gained his ends with him; and now

threw him aside as he would fling away an orange or any other fruit which he had sucked dry—nay, he even tried to crush him beneath his feet! for, was it not this very Dauvert who was leagued with the Duke's heirs-at-law to get the will set aside as illegal; and who was abetting Dercy's own relations in their attempt to get his property put under a commission of lunacy? The eagerness with which his old school-fellow seemed to avoid him, increased the aversion that Dercy felt at this moment towards the greater part of his own species.

Feeling how important it was that he should not lose a moment in informing both Darbolin and Dupré of George's return to Paris, Dauvert left his wife in the company of some ladies of their acquaintance, and proceeded directly to the Viscount's, who said, that he and the old lawyer would again lay their heads together, and consult what was best to be done. Dauvert next called upon

Dupré, whom he found still intent upon taking out a statute of lunacy, but rather puzzled how he should be able to produce such facts as would afford sufficient grounds for a proceeding of this nature. On hearing therefore from Dauvert that when he saw him in the Tuilleries, George was walking with an air of abstraction, muttering to himself, and to all appearance much agitated, this worthy relation cried out: "Well, is not such behaviour a proof of his mind being affected?—To be sure it is." Hardly had he made this observation when a letter from George was delivered to him, informing him that his cousin had determined to take the management of his affairs into his own hands, and requesting that he would prepare a statement of the accounts between them. This epistle, which had been written by Dercy in a state of considerable irritation and perturbation, was not couched in the most perspicuous

language, nor was the style so correct as it might have been, many sentences being left abrupt and unterminated and words here and there omitted, so that it certainly did indicate much distraction of mind in the writer. "He now writes for a statement of accounts;" said the *ci-devant* attorney, who would have been more puzzled to have furnished them, than to discover reasons for proceeding against Dercy as a person of unsound mind. "Can you now doubt any longer whether he is out of his senses or not? You met him to-day in the Tuilleries, walking and talking to himself like a lunatic; and now he sends to me an abusive letter, desiring me to surrender up his property, and give him a statement of the accounts relative to it!—You see that he mistrusts even me—I, who have saved him from ruin and beggary! 'Tis plain enough—'tis beyond all doubt, that he is absolutely insane, a man of unsound mind,

whose property must be put into the hands of trustees."

In order to assail our hero in every quarter, Dauvert now returned to his wife, and drove with her to her father's to dinner; when he cautiously hinted to the Receiver-General that it was his duty to compel George legally to account for the disappearance of his niece.

Here was surely a combination of misfortunes enough to drive any man to distraction: yet that which caused George more uneasiness than aught beside was the thought of Victorine. Heavily did the day pass away; but towards evening the return of the messenger whom he had dispatched to Dieppe was announced. He hurried instantly to meet him, and learnt, that in spite of all his inquiries and researches, he had been able to gain no tidings of the fair fugitive: at this intelligence the faint glimmering of hope was extinguished that had hitherto

served to keep him from total despondency.—Then Victorine—his dear Victorine, is lost to him for ever!

The next day the statement prepared by George's advocate appeared: it was forcible in its arguments, but it contained neither invective, nor pathos, nor rhetorical flourishes, and consisted only of dry reasoning. The validity of the Duke's will was proved most completely; but no appeal was made to the passions in favour of the party accused, nor were the insinuations that had been thrown out against him attempted to be refuted. "Well," said the good-natured public, "the heirs-at-law must lose; nothing can hinder their adversary from gaining the day; but what does this prove, after all, except that this Dercy has been too cunning for them, and has taken every precaution to secure his manœuvres from exposure? He is not on this account one jot less mercenary; but he is rather a crafty hypocrite who has hitherto con-

trived to impose upon all the world. Whether he loses or gains his cause, has he any more title to our esteem?—is he a less dishonourable character?"

Notwithstanding, however, all these attacks and aspersions, and notwithstanding too that he would not be benefitted by the Duke's will, he never once thought of revealing the motive that had induced him to accept the fortune that had been bequeathed to him.

Two days afterwards, a third statement relative to the subject of the will, appeared, that suddenly changed the face of the whole businesss. It was from quite a new party, who voluntarily stepped forward on the occasion; and this party was no other than Francis Leclercq himself.

CHAP. X.

GEORGE SECLUDES HIMSELF FROM THE WORLD.

LECLERCQ had been in Paris for some days after returning from a journey that he had been making in Franche Comte, for the purpose of visiting the estate which he intended to purchase, and where he intended to establish a manufactory. Immediately on his arrival in town he had called upon Dercy, but had been informed that he was not at home: and afterwards, on his return to the hotel where he lodged, he found there the libellous *Memoire* which his father's relations had published against George. "Good God!" exclaimed he; "and this fortune then, which the worthy M. Dercy accepts only that he may transfer it to

me—he is accused of employing the basest means in order to appropriate it to himself! A generous action is imputed to him as a crime, and shall I suffer him to endure all this obloquy without making any reply to the calumnies with which he is assaulted?"

Leclerq was a young man of generous and lively feelings, of a petulant and warm temper, quick in forming his resolutions, and still more prompt in putting them into execution. His poor mother had been able to bring him up only as a mechanic; but this mother, who, although the victim of passion, and of circumstances, was a woman deserving of a better fate, had bestowed on her son an education much superior to what the circumstances in which she was placed seemed to warrant; so that on coming out of his apprenticeship, he was far more capable of writing than many a young nobleman who had just left his tutor.

Without asking the advice of any one,

Leclerq resolved to reply at once to the statement that had been published against George. During the whole night he did nothing but think on the subject; and the next morning took his pen and wrote during nearly the whole day; he then went to a printer, who engaged to print his document and to distribute it the very next day, in as much profusion as that of the other party had been. The Duke's son defended Dercy with a simplicity and unaffected warmth that carried conviction with them: without launching out against his father's relatives, and without making any observations injurious to the memory of the late Duke, he merely stated in a perspicuous and energetic manner how that nobleman had been desirous of repairing the wrongs towards his mother; and he expressed the gratitude he felt for the method he had taken to secure to him his property, by entrusting it to one of the most honest men in the whole world—M. George Dercy.

He then proceeded to relate how, in consequence of some doubts as to his rights of paternity, the Duke had not been able either to appoint him his heir, or name him as residuary legatee; and that therefore the only way which remained for him was to bequeath his property to some man of strict integrity who would deliver it up to his son. He entered into detail as to the whole of George's conduct with regard to him, and the caution and secresy with which he had made the necessary inquiries relative to him and his mother, before he accepted the legacy; also the care and secrecy with which, after he had accepted the bequest, he consulted with him as to the manner in which he should employ the fortune after being put into possession of it; the liberality with which he had behaved towards him and his mother, even before he had touched any of the property—a liberality so much the more valued by him, as he was by this very

means now enabled to print to a considerable extent this paper which was intended to justify and clear from all aspersions the character of the man whom he was proud thus publicly to proclaim as his benefactor. He concluded by repelling with as much indignation as grief, all the imputations which had been cast upon George. "Among these imputations," said he, "there are some which it is not in my power to explain clearly; but that they are false and calumnious in the highest degree, I do not scruple to affirm; since it is impossible that a man who has acted with so much generosity, and with so much honour towards me, should act unjustly towards others. Let malignant people, and those personal enemies of M. Dercy, who are as interested as they are violent, impute to him both culpable intentions and actions, I will relate actions which he has performed with the same spirit of generosity with which they were conceived. Let others

publish monstrous facts, of which they only show themselves to be culpable; I relate those good actions which he has actually performed. Yes, it was in order to secure his fortune to me and my poor mother, that the Duke bequeathed it to the virtuous M. Dercy. In his hands it was only a sacred deposit, and he has most religiously performed the duty that was confided to him. And yet the world dares to accuse this man, so eminently generous and delicate in his conduct, of condescending to the basest intrigues that he might enrich himself to the prejudice of others! The most disinterested of mankind is accused of acting like a sordid, mercenary creature—like a person devoid of all principle! But I feel it to be my duty to defend him; and in order to do so I have only to relate the simple truth, and disclose what he has done for me."

It is well known with what intense interest the public occupy themselves

at Paris with the report or the news of the day. At this juncture the Chambers were closed, there was no trial of particular interest, nor any new tragedy, opera, or melo-drame that was the rage: in this dearth, therefore, of novelty the discussion between George and the heirs-at-law of the Duke was become general town-talk, and the *Memoire* of young Leclercq was read with avidity. If it generally happens that high-flown, sentimental language, and intemperate abuse create a momentary sensation, it sometimes happens too that a plain, unaffected recital of facts, in which there is an air of truth that cannot for a moment be mistaken, and which it is equally impossible to imitate, obtains a success as instantaneous as it is complete. For it often seems that, precisely because they have given credit to calumnious fabrications, the public feel the necessity of being just, and of acknowledging their error. Such in fact was the effect

produced by the *Memoire* published by Leclercq. There was such a tone of frankness in it, and all the facts so clearly and positively stated, that it instantly turned every one in favour of Dercy.

The first person who hastened to congratulate him on this occasion was the man who had never for an instant suspected him, who had pertinaciously defended him, had incurred anger in doing so, and was only distressed that he was not able to defend him more successfully—his friend Dharville. With what transport did he embrace George! his joy seemed to partake of the nature of a delirium. "Now you are completely justified," exclaimed he, "in the eyes of the whole world, and your enemies must be as completely confounded! Yet why did you not entrust me with your secret? I did not need to be made acquainted with it in order to be sure that you were the most honourable and

the most disinterested of men: but I would have declared your innocence to the world, and all the world should long ago have done you justice. Oh! what a good, honest creature is this son of the Duke, of whom no one knew till now."

George had read Leclercq's *Memoire*, and his mind was greatly relieved by it; he was, too, not insensible to the sincere joy which his friend testified on finding him thus vindicated from the aspersions that had been thrown out against him; and yet, when he reflected that his secret was now made public, he could not help feeling a certain vague and undefined apprehension. At this moment another visitor was announced— one whose altered behaviour caused him the greatest satisfaction. This was no other than the advocate into whose hands he had put his cause, and who but two days before had shown himself so cold towards him—or rather had treated

him with such undisguised contempt, but who now spoke to him with so much warmth and kindness, and expressed so much esteem for him. Hardly had he begged his client's pardon for the suspicions he had entertained of him at their first interview, and the sincere regard that he now felt for him, before a third personage made his appearance, —the son o. the Duke of * * *. While young Leclercq was taking his breakfast at a *Café* where there were a great many other persons, he heard both of the success of his *Memoire* and of George's return; and hastened to wait upon him. "Heaven be praised," exclaimed Dercy, as the young man threw himself into his arms with great emotion: "heaven be praised, all the world is not ungrateful, nor ungenerous!" He then introduced Leclercq to his friend and to the advocate; and it is not difficult to imagine with what warmth Dharville expressed himself towards the young

man, or in what emphatic terms he thanked him for having cleared the honour of his friend; nor was the advocate at all sparing of his commendations either of his client, or Leclercq.

"Yes, young man," said he, "you have done an act that reflects credit upon your heart, but one that is at the same time most imprudent. It completely vindicates M. Dercy's character, and restores him to the good opinion of the world; but it will also, I fear, deprive him of the happiness of enriching you."

"How so?"

"I do not ask my client whether he has received any injunction from the testator as to the purpose to which his bequest is to be applied; for I fear that in so doing I should reduce him to the alternative of either disguising the truth or replying to me with too much frankness. But, in fact, there is no occasion

for me to make such a question: does not the declaration which you yourself have written and have published to the world prove sufficiently that the property in question has been left to M. Dercy, only that he might transmit it to you? But this you must know is an act strictly prohibited by our laws. It is one of the greatest imperfections of human justice that laws can be formed only with a view to general, and not to particular circumstances; and that it is impossible to have a special law for each individual case: yet this cannot be; and what would be perfectly equitable in the present instance between yourself, the testator, and M. Dercy, would in a number of other cases be exceedingly unjust; the law, therefore, is perfectly right in not allowing any such acts." He then proceeded to cite that article of the Code that forbids any kind of substitution, and every Fidei-commissum or feoffment of trust; and which, conse-

quently, annulled most positively the residuary-legateeship that the Duke had made in favour of George. "Yesterday, M. Dercy," continued he, "you were innocent in the eye of the law though condemned by public opinion; to-day, it is quite the reverse, you are now acquitted by public opinion and culpable in the eyes of the law." After these words there was a momentary silence among all the four persons present; and it was Leclercq who first broke it.

"I was apprehensive," said he, "that it would be so. My father's precaution in naming a third party to receive his fortune in trust for me, has caused me a presentiment that his views would be defeated, and that I should not be permitted to enjoy this fortune, if I revealed his secret. Yet this fear and this presentiment have not deterred me a single instant from acting as I have done, and as I thought myself called upon to do; for had I not to vin-

dicate the character of an honest man—of one who had punctually discharged his duties towards me?—Well, I shall at least be no poorer now than I have been all my life; and the only reason for which I regret the loss of fortune is on account of my poor mother."

George was much affected at these last words, for he himself too had been most tenderly attached to his parent. "No," cried he, "no; you shall have nothing to regret on your mother's account. Alas! I have myself lost a valued mother, nor is there any one now for whose sake fortune is any longer a consideration with me. I am a solitary insulated being," and as he said so, the thought of Victorine—her at whose feet he would have been delighted to lay all that he was worth in the world, the tears started in his eyes.

"What unjust, what iniquitous laws!" exclaimed Dharville indignantly: "Surely, Sir," added he, turning to the advocate, "you must be mistaken. When

you inform the court of all that this worthy young man has related in his statement, can there be a judge who would not blush, were he to punish him so cruelly for the generous manner in which he has come forward thus publicly to vindicate his benefactor?"

"The magistrates," replied the advocate, "will doubtless regret the sentence that they will be obliged to return; but they will as certainly decide that the residuary-legateeship is become null and void. I do not wish you, however, to depend upon my judgment alone: I am now going home to meet two other advocates, with whom I have this morning appointed a meeting on some business: do you come, therefore, and take their opinion also. I find that I myself need their assistance in this case, and I most sincerely hope that they may not think the same as I do in this matter."

They all accompanied the advocate to

his house, and, on their way thither, Dharville still persisted in saying that he was certain he must be under some error. Leclerq, although rather uneasy on his mother's account, as to the turn things might take, still did not regret having acted as he had done; but felt that self-satisfaction, and that species of self-esteem, so honourable and so soothing to the feelings of a young man who has just been performing a duty, even though the consequences are prejudicial to him. As for George he was entirely buried in his own reflections.

The consultation was not a very long one; for the other two advocates found the article of the code in questions so distinct, and the declaration that had been made by Leclerq so positive, that it had appeared to them utterly impossible that the will should not be set aside. But in spite of the uniform opinion of the three professional men, Dharville strongly urged that they

should prepare to defend the cause. "Let them if they will," said the young man, "take all the money. I have still youth and strength; I can work for my mother's support, and shall have at all events the satisfaction of knowing that I have overturned their calumnies against my worthy benefactor, M. Dercy."

"It is me after all," said George gravely, "whom the Duke named the residuary-legatee; and it is therefore for me to judge whether I shall give up the property without litigation, or persist in claiming it, and carry the matter into a court of justice. And I will consider how it will be best for me to act. In the meanwhile, gentlemen, I am obliged to you for your advice."

After the advocates had taken their leave, Dercy and his two friends walked to the Tuilleries. The day was very fine, and there was as much company as when George last passed through the gardens, and experienced the slights and insults which we then noticed. But now the

very persons who had then turned away their heads that they might not see, or stepped aside so as to avoid meeting, him, seemed most eager to speak to him, to compliment him, and eager to shake hands with him. George would fain have escaped from this public testimony to his honourable conduct, but Dharville compelled him to stay and listen to the praises that were bestowed on him from every side; then, addressing those who had suspected the integrity of his friend, he cried, "Well, what think you now? You refused to believe me when I assured you that M. Dercy was a man of the strictest honour—the nicest delicacy: but was I not right?" Then taking Leclerq, who had been quite unnoticed till that moment, by the hand, he added, "Give me leave to introduce to you the Duke of * * *'s son—the gentleman to whom we are so much indebted for having published the document that has so completely vindicated the character of

my friend." And instantly every one was eager to express to the young man the admiration he felt for his noble and disinterested behaviour.

George was not insensible to these marks of general approbation and esteem. "And yet," said he to himself, "these are the very people who so lately, giving credit to the calumnious reports of my enemies, treated me as a man destitute not only of honour, but of every principle of honesty."

That same evening while George was engaged in a consultation with his counsel, his cousin Dupré had invited the Doctor and La Morinière to read over with him the draught of a petition praying that their relative, George Dercy, should be put under a commission of lunacy, as being a person of unsound mind, and unfit to be trusted with the administration of his property. He had just unfolded the paper and was proceeding to read it to them, when Madame Saint

Firmin came, quite astonished at what she had heard respecting her nephew. Both Dupré and the Doctor had had a copy of Leclerq's *Memoire* sent to them; but the latter was from home when it came; and the other had been so intent upon framing and drawing up his petition that he had not opened the envelope. Madame Saint Firmin however had read it over, and, piquing herself upon her fine feelings and sensibility, had been quite affected with Dercy's noble conduct. Calling afterwards upon many of her acquaintance, among whom there was a general enthusiasm in favour of George, she was almost instantly electrified by it, for nothing communicates itself with such rapidity and enthusiasm; and, quite proud of being the aunt of one who was the object of general admiration and esteem, she came in her turn to impart something of this enthusiasm to his other relations. "And do you talk," said she, "of taking out a commission of lunacy against this

man?—what him who is a model of goodness, justice, and generosity? They ought rather to be treated as insane and mad, who dare to form such wicked plots against him." And she then proceeded to relate with no little emphasis, all that she had heard respecting him, and the encomiums that had every where been bestowed upon him. This tended not little to disconcert his worthy relatives but Dupré, less struck with admiration at George's conduct than the others, thought that he had never before afforded such a complete and irresistible proof of insanity, than when being in possession of such a property, he had had the folly to transmit it to a child of the testator, without being compellable by law. The perplexity of these worthy relations increased when Madame Saint Firmin informed them of the marks of respect that had been paid to both Dercy and Leclercq in the gardens of the Tuilleries.

"Diable! diable!" said Dupré to him-

self, "what can we hope to do against a man in whose behalf all Paris seems interested, and whom they will take under their protection?" And when Madame informed them also, that the Viscount who happened to be in the Tuilleries at the same time, had been compelled to make a sudden retreat, in order to avoid the resentment that the public manifested towards him, and the indignation which they expressed at his attempting to set aside the Duke's will; he exclaimed, "Good heavens, if this be the case, I shall not dare to venture abroad: what if they should handle me worse than they have served the poor Viscount?" Discouraged at so unexpected a turn of affairs, instead of proceeding to read his paper, he folded it up and put it into his pocket: then taking up Leclercq's *Memoire*, that was lying on his writing-table, he offered to read it to the Doctor and La Morinière; and whilst he was doing so, they both seemed to feel some compunction

for their treatment of George. Even Dupré himself affected to admire Dercy's heroic generosity and disinterestedness; but speaking of Leclercq, he said, "This fellow is even a greater ass than our worthy cousin:—he has actually ruined himself by acting as he has done.—But still it is fine, very generous, very sublime!"

He had just finished reading the *Memoire* when George himself made his appearance; and at the sight of him they were covered with confusion. They had been so culpable towards him, and had always affected to think so meanly of him; and now how much more contemptuous an opinion must he entertain of them! Such is at times the power of virtue when it is triumphant, that it absolutely terrifies and confounds those who, feeling themselves unable to practise it, are on that very account the more obliged to admire it. On his entering the room they were all struck silent, and

rose almost involuntarily from their seats; while Dercy standing likewise, looked first at one, then at the other, with a mingled expression of sorrow and anger. At length, the Doctor having in some degree recovered from his surprise, and endeavouring to force a smile, said:—"You perceive, my dear nephew, that you are the subject of our thoughts and conversation. We were just reading the *Memoire* which has been published by the young man towards whom you have behaved with so much generosity."

"What, then," cried George, with a smile of bitterness that they had never till that moment seen him employ; "it was not then the petition for a commission of lunacy against me, that my cousin Dupré was reading to you?"

Here every one looked quite abashed, and fixed his eyes on the ground.

"I would have you to know, nephew, said Madame Saint Firmin, with some quickness; "that both the Doctor and

myself were perfectly ignorant.—For my own part I am quite charmed with you!"

"My dear aunt," returned George, mildly; "I am willing to believe you are sincere in the compliments you bestow upon me; but in mercy spare me the hearing of them: all those to which I have been this morning obliged to listen, merely because I have performed an act of duty, fatigue and importune me." Then, addressing himself to his uncle and cousins:—"Why," said he, "should you attempt to consider me unfit to be trusted with the management of my own property, and endeavour to obtain a statute of lunacy against me, as I have just understood to be the case? Listen my worthy relations, to what I am going to say, and you will perceive that it will be only giving yourselves useless trouble. The world," continued he, in a severe and gloomy tone is become hateful to me; "for among the great part of mankind I have found only false-

hood, vanity, and interestedness. How have you yourselves treated me, even from my childhood? You, my nearest relations, and who ought, as such, next to my kind and regretted parents, to have been my best friends;—you to whom I have shown so much attachment; how have you treated me in return? Because I was unsuspecting and confiding, you applied to me a term of reproach—an insulting name;—you called me the Simpleton, the Novice. I was disinterested, and you feared lest I should bring disgrace upon the family. And this Dauvert, too, my early school-fellow, to whom from the very first of our acquaintance, I have always shown so many kindnesses, and for whom I have performed so many services, he who has uniformly imposed upon my goodness and my friendship, and who after all his other plots has just been forming a base and cruel conspiracy against me—But I reproach neither you nor him,

more than I do other men. Your principles are the principles of almost all the rest of the world. I was in a situation where I flattered myself I was of some service, but I was turned out of it merely because I did not wish entirely to give up my conscience. My whole life sufficiently proves that I am neither ambitious nor mercenary, and yet I have been suspected, nay, more, accused of resorting to the violent and most nefarious arts, in order to chouse others out of their rights. And a generous and noble-spirited young man—for, thank heaven, there are some exceptions—were there not, one could not endure to live in the world!—This generous young man, I say, has been obliged to divulge a secret of the utmost importance to himself, in order to convert the clamours that had been raised against me into expressions of lively approbation, that to-morrow again, perhaps, will give way to fresh reproaches, caused by fresh ca-

lumnies. And what, after all, are the vaunted advantages of wealth, that we should thus sacrifice to it? Tell me, if you can, what service our uncle the banker did us, when he enriched us with his property. Of what use, Doctor Saint Firmin, has your fortune proved to you? It was that that inspired you with all those ambitious projects in which you have failed. As for you, cousin La Morinière, it has led both you and your son into ruinous extravagancies. In you, Dupré, it has been the source of insatiable avarice. And I, had I continued poor, I should, perhaps, be enjoying that happiness which I must now renounce for ever." Here he paused, lifted his eyes to heaven, and said in a low tone, "O! my dear Victorine, where now are you?" Then looking again at his relations, he continued: "This wealth, then, Dupré, which you are so anxiously intent upon increasing, must be exceedingly dear to you! And you,

Doctor, and you La Morinière, doubtless, both regret it very much. But I—this wealth that you so much hanker after is become burdensome and odious to me:—I reject it, I disdain it, I will have nothing more to do with it. I have made all my arrangements, and they will forthwith be put into execution. I have just been giving the necessary instructions to my solicitor, and I will now inform you what they are. In the first place, I offer the estate that was left me by my father to my tenant, Claude Lallemand, for ten years purchase-money, which I shall order him to pay into the treasury of the hospital at * * *, where you wished to provide for poor old Margaret. To you, Doctor, I have secured a sum that will be sufficient to pay off the mortages with which you have encumbered your estates. I shall pay your debts, La Morinière, and those of your son; but I must caution you both how you

contract new ones, as, after this, I neither intend, nor will it be in my power, to assist you. You will apply to my solicitor, whom I have fully empowered to act for me. And you, Dupré, will account to him for my property that is in your hands; I have, too, strictly charged him to have no altercation with you respecting any slight deficiency there may be. The indiscreet generosity of Leclerq has prevented me from transmitting to him his father's fortune; for the law is positive on this point, and, therefore, to-morrow it will be intimated to the heirs-at-law, that I renounce the Duke's bequest. But it has been to save my honour, that the young man has acted so imprudently; consequently I consider myself as his debtor. It is beyond my power to bestow on him a fortune equal to that which he has lost; but I have made over to him a third of the property I inherited from my great-

uncle. He will probably decline accepting it, but I will conjure him to do so for the sake of his mother; he will not then refuse me; and may still have it in his power to establish the manufactory which he intended. Of the whole million francs which I once possessed I shall reserve to myself only the two-hundred thousand, which I borrowed with a hope that rendered me happy at the time, but which is now vanished. That which may remain after your debts are paid, and Leclerq has received what I appropriate to him, I make a donation of to various charitable institutions in this city. I shall quit Paris, but shall not go to reside at * * *, or any where in that neighbourhood, for I should then fear coming into contact with many whom I desire to avoid. I am, besides, desirous of living in complete solitude. After all, you cannot be much interested in knowing the place of my retreat, for I have not

now above a fifth of the property of which you were so envious. Dharville alone will know this secret, and he will not reveal it to any one. I have now nothing farther to add, except that I bid you farewell!"

As soon as he had left the room, his relations took their leave of each other, quite confused. "Well," cried Dupré, as soon as he was left alone, "I now see that he will continue to be a consummate blockhead till the end of his days. After all, I did him no injustice in saying he was a madman."

Whilst George had been making these arrangements, and afterwards informing his relations of them, Dharville was busily occupied in going every where, and extolling the noble disinterestedness of his friend; nor did he by any means spare those who had been attempting to injure him, especially M. Dauvert, to-

wards whom he was certainly not the most charitably disposed, and whom he denounced as a man of the basest principles—as a mean sycophant, and a perfidious friend.

CHAP. XI.

THE HISTORY OF EIGHT YEARS.

At first George's relations endeavoured to ascertain the place he had fixed upon as his retreat; yet, as they had nothing farther to expect from him, and no particular interest in making the discovery, their curiosity on the subject gradually wore away. They accustomed themselves to think no more of him, but even to persuade themselves that he was dead; and, in fact, might he not be said to be so with regard to them? The Dubrocards and Dauverts, too, thought as little of their niece and cousin, Victorine Lorsay, as George's uncle and cousins did of him. The time and attention of all these worthy people were entirely devoted to their personal inte-

rests, and to the respective objects of their cupidity and ambition. Victorine's name was never uttered by her kind family without having some reproachful epithet attached to it, such as a foolish, ungrateful girl. And, in spite of the obligations they were under to him, both La Morinière and the Doctor had resumed their old habit of speaking of George as a simpleton and novice, while Dupré did not scruple occasionally to term him an ungrateful fellow.

There are a great number of people who are unfortunate, and who are harassed by disquietude, because they never succeed in what they undertake, and are disappointed in all their hopes and projects. Yet when men are carried away by mean and violent passions, and insatiable desires, and plunge into greedy or ambitious schemes, are those who succeed in their designs more happy than those who fail? or are they less unfortunate? No; they suffer full as much

—perhaps more. You who are wealthy and powerful, you who possess rank and authority, and you the minor and subaltern minions of ambition, scccessful favourites and protegees, if, in order to attain your object, you have trampled on morality and justice, if you are destitute of all moderation for yourselves, and of all feelings of kindness for others, it is in vain that you would impose on us by your ostentatious pomp and your pretended happiness; you are not on that account less miserable, less the prey of cares and vexations, less tormented both in body and mind, condemned to suffer all the tortures that arise from the apprehension of losing, the anxiety to gain, the desire to rise still higher, the fear of being hurled down headlong from the point you have already reached;—the tortures that arise from that remorse of conscience which you cannot suppress; from the public indignation and contempt that

show themselves through the midst of purchased praises and interested acclamations; from that self-contempt that lurks at the bottom of your own hearts, and from which you cannot escape. Such was the success enjoyed by George's relations and those of the Duke, who had at length obtained the wealth they had been grasping at with so much avidity. Public opinion had manifested itself in the most forcible manner against both the Viscount and the other heirs-at-law; and they were at first terrified at it, but as soon as they learnt that George had disclaimed the residuary legateeship, how quickly did they console themselves for the contempt shown them. "Let the world hoot and hiss us as much as they please; let them make ballads and epigrams on us, of what importance is it all to us?" exclaimed each of these worthies, as he calculated the gold he should have to receive as his portion of the pro-

perty. These hypocritical gentry, although they still retained a strong feeling of resentment towards the deceased Duke, for having wished to exclude them from sharing in his property, resolved nevertheless to have a grand funeral mass celebrated for the repose of his soul. This is a custom that the heirs of wealthy testators seldom fail to observe: George's relations had acted just in the same manner on the death of the Ex-Jesuit. After this ceremony there was a splendid dinner, at which the Viscount presided, and the harmony that prevailed was truly edifying: there was much shaking of hands, and many congratulations between all present, nor were they exceedingly uncharitable towards the "old curmudgeon," who had paid them such a paltry compliment in his will, but they were loud in their praises of each other;—and then the very next morning twenty law-suits were

commenced among them. Every one was anxious to increase his own share of the property at the expense of the other heirs, they all, therefore, went to law most vigorously, and abused each other most unsparingly; while every act of litigation only tended to increase their mutual hatred and ill-will. They were even so lost to shame as to dispute who should be compelled to pay for a superb monument that they had ordered to be erected to the memory of the late Duke. All that eventually accrued to them from the immense property that had fallen to them, was a considerable loss of time in journeys, litigations, and law proceedings. There was not one of them who was not obliged, at last, after having expended his share of the property, to part with a good deal of his former property in order to complete the payment of advocates, solicitors, attorneys, with their host of law expenses. And there are some of these suits that are not yet terminated.

After his property had been cleared of all the mortgages upon it, by George, Doctor Saint Firmin might have lived very respectably, but unfortunately his electioneering had not cured him of his foolish ambition. After his unfortunate campaign in the cause of Liberalism, he thought that a reputation for science might be of service to him in his political plans, and help to open for him the doors of the Chamber of Deputies. With this view he published at his own expense some medical works: and as polities find their way everywhere, he very ingeniously contrived to display his ministerial bias, for he had thought proper to change his colours, and try whether he should not be more successful on the other side. These productions obtained for him some praise, in those quarters where praise is an article that may be purchased in any quantity, but they drew down upon him the ridicule of all well-informed men

and competent judges. He next contrived to be admitted into the Royal Academy of Medicine that was then just instituted; and in every question between that body and the government he was uniformly of the side of power. He did not, however, stop here; for as soon as there was any place vacant in the Academy of Science, whether in chemistry, mineralogy, botany, anatomy, medicine, surgery, or even rural economy, he had the effrontery to offer himself as a candidate. But in such an institution the same kind of manœuvring and influence that succeeds at an election will be of little avail. He could not even carry his point so far as to get himself nominated as one of those who were to put up for the vacant situation. Neither was he for a long time more successful in his efforts to be elected Deputy; for the party whose favour and support he now courted had not forgotten that he had been a Liberal,

and viewed him with suspicion on that account. At length, in a fit of despair, he turned devotee,—no bad way, after all, of pushing himself forward, for a devotee physician is such an edifying example! He now got patients among dowagers of quality, prelates and dignitaries of the church; but even still there were some persons who questioned his sincerity, both in politics and religion. Something yet remained to be done, when he recollected that the order of St Wladimir, of the third rank, had been bestowed on him: on the strength of this he found means to get himself recommended to the Russian Ambassador, and through the influence of the latter, it was arranged that he should be returned for the Chamber of Deputies. Indeed it was now high time that he should be elected, for his fortune was so much injured that he was barely eligible. He was now at the ultimatum of his wishes; he attained the goal he

had so long had in view; and, as if in some degree to repay him for repeated disappointment and delay, he was chosen just at the period when the *Septennalité* was established, so that he was sure of continuing Deputy for seven years.

What a noble, what a glorious character is that of a Deputy who is animated by the love of his country, and the love of the human race; whose mind is elevated, firm, and inaccessible to corruption, to seduction, to influence; and who uniformly both speaks and votes according to his conscience. Whatever be the success of his undertakings, whatever be his own personal success, he is happy in knowing and in performing his duties; he enjoys with the purest satisfaction the public gratitude, the general homage paid to his character and his talents, and the esteem which even his most violent enemies cannot refuse him.

But, on the contrary, how degraded

and contemptible is that Deputy who had made himself the slave and tool of a party; who, knowing his duties, deserts them; who thinks, speaks, and votes, just as he is ordered to do! His party, indeed, may triumph; but, as for himself, is he not a truly abject creature?—Such, we must acknowledge, was our Doctor Saint Firmin.

Without talents, without integrity, without conscience, and blindly submissive to the orders it was expected he should follow; in spite of his abjectness towards men of rank, sneered at by them for his mean birth, despised by them for his conduct, and courted by them only for his vote; invited by all the ministers, yet treated contemptuously by them; he had, besides all this, the vexation to hear his election stigmatized by very respectable individuals as a most impudent fraud. His election, however, was declared valid; but much mortification resulted from it to the Doctor, accompanied by not a few

apprehensions; yet he was not doomed to suffer them long; for although he had congratulated himself on being elected for seven years, he did not live to see the end of the first session, for he died of a fit of indigestion shortly after a grand dinner that had taken place after a long discussion in the 'Chamber,' in which he had marvellously exerted his lungs, not in any display of his eloquence, but in cries of 'hear, hear, hear.'

More out of blind weakness than from real affection, La Morinière had done all in his power for his scape-grace of a son; when about six months after George's departure the young fellow was killed in a duel. In order to dissipate the grief he felt on this melancholy event, the father abandoned himself to dissipation with a new phrenzy, and contracted debts to a greater amount than those which had been discharged by Dercy; in consequence of which his creditors compelled him more than once to take up

his abode in St. Pelagie, where he contrived to spend as much as he did when he was at large. At length, being liberated, and the means of contracting fresh debts being now exhausted, he resolved, as a last resource, to marry an old woman whom he understood to have considerable property, and whom he had induced to believe that he was very rich. What then was the rage and distraction of both, when they discovered that they had fallen into the snare each had laid for the other! The connubial state certainly proved to them no paradise or elysium. What really became of him at last we cannot say; some affirm that, worn out by debauchery and riot, he ended his days miserably in an hospital; others say that he died, after all, within the walls of a prison, into which he was thrown by his cousin Dupré, who arrested him after having lent him some money in a fit of extraordinary generosity.

Dupré himself had by a variety of usurious transactions amassed heaps of wealth. After some time he would not enter into any negociations in which there was the least risk, but would advance money only on pledges, or ample security. Was any tradesman or merchant in difficulties, he might apply to M. Dupré; and, provided he would leave in his hands the greater part of his stock, might be sure of being assisted by the man of wealth. M. Dupré figured, too, as a principal creditor in almost every bankruptcy that took place; but he had generally taken good care not to lose a single sous, holding effects that would amply cover his debt. Yet by the side of his well furnished strong box, the object of his constant devotions, he lived like a poor wretch reduced to mendicity; for he seemed to have adopted as his principle, that in proportion as a man's income increases his expenditure ought to diminish. He drank only water;

he dined—if indeed he might be said to dine at all—quite alone; hardly allowed himself a fire; went almost in rags; was always lamenting his poverty, and dared hardly to venture to go to sleep at night for fear of being robbed. In short, he became an object of general aversion, or rather contempt: no one cared to speak to him, except those who would sometimes amuse themselves at his expense, and put him into a violent passion, by affirming that he was rich. As soon as the subject of a Law of Indemnity for the emigrants was first started, there was a general commotion and sensation among the whole legal profession, who thought that it could not fail to be productive of extraordinary employment to them. It is even said that on this occasion there was such an enormous demand for lawyers' bags, and tin-boxes to keep papers in, that the manufacturers of those articles were unable to supply them in sufficient numbers. This was a signal for our

worthy Dupré to enter the lists once more. He was yet not past the prime of life; and what a fine field now opened itself to a man so well skilled in all the windings and turnings of chicanery! What numberless disputes and litigations would start up in every corner of France! what a number of law-suits; how many proceedings both on the part of the exchequer and against it; between claimants and their creditors, or the creditors of their fathers, or those of their children! And then, after the Law of Indemnity in favour of the emigrants, there would, perhaps, be another in favour of the clergy. Perhaps too, something might be done for those unfortunate fund-holders who, by the national bankruptcy had been deprived of two-thirds of their property, which may thus be said to have been confiscated;—something for those speculators who had been ruined by the *maximum;* and for those proprietors whose houses and property had been demolished.

All these misfortunes had been forgotten, but the recollection of them was now again stirred up; and those who had suffered by them, pretending to have been as faithful as the French of the farther Rhine, although so recently, perhaps, holding posts under Napoleon, would, perhaps, set up such a cry that it would be impossible not to attend to them.

"Oh!" cried Dupré, "what fine pickings will all this afford us! what perquisites! what fees for us agents and lawyers! I foresee, that I shall be able shortly to double, to triple—perhaps, even quadruple the contents of my strong box."

But his brethren in the profession had been already beforehand with him; they had issued prospectuses and circular letters; they had been making journeys for the purpose, and soliciting the favours of all those who had any claims to the indemnity:—all the clients were already laid hold of. The avaricious Dupré, unwilling

to risk even a single sou, or incur the slightest expence, who grudged to give away even a card of address, and was so far from offering to advance money to his clients so as to enable them to go to law, that he even applied to them for it; had the mortification and the grief to find that no one would confide in or employ him.

Ferdinand Dauvert, the son of a poor gentleman of family, had, by his address, contrived to form a rich, and what the world terms a very splendid, matrimonial connexion; without possessing either information or real capacity, he held places both of considerable emolument and importance; and, after having been himself for a long while a servile dependent and hanger-on of Ministers and men in power, he, in his turn, had his protegees and creatures who fawned upon him. He had indeed been overwhelmed with confusion, vexation, and rage, when he saw Dercy the inheritor

of the wealth that he had, with so much meanness, been trying to secure for himself; but had not both his envy and his hatred been subsequently gratified, when George was compelled to give up the property to the heirs-at-law, and thus prevented from accomplishing an act of honour and benevolence? Dauvert had taken a very active part with the Duke's relations; yet with so much secrecy, that no one suspected him of being leagued with them against his former benefactor; therefore his character had not been at all injured with the world in consequence. Every thing seemed to be propitious to him: his fortune was soon after considerably augmented by the death of the Receiver-General; and as there was no will, Madame Dubrocard found herself completely at the mercy of her daughter and her son-in-law: and this son-in-law adhering to his maxim of sacrificing every one else to himself, was not very indulgent towards her. He would not allow

her to reside, as it was her wish to do, at the house out of town—the same into which he had himself gained admittance by a despicable artifice; therefore poor Madame Dubrocard, terribly punished for her pride and vanity, was obliged to take mean lodgings in the *Marais*, having nothing to subsist upon but a very moderate jointure. Her principal acquaintance was Madame Saint Firmin, who was quite as much reduced as herself, by the chicaneries of her nephew, Dupré: and here did these two widows tenderly bewail to each other the loss of their husbands and of their fortunes.

'Hardly was the time of mourning expired, ere Dauvert and his wife launched out into great extravagance, doubling their former expenditure. Madame was to be seen at all public places, and at every private party of consequence. The husband gave splendid dinners, balls, and entertainments; played high, and kept mistresses. But in the midst of all this round of extrava-

gance, pleasure, and dissipation, he met with a sudden reverse. He enjoyed several salaries, and not a few sinecures; and his wife's fortune was a very ample one; still even all this was not sufficient for their united extravagance:—he had recourse to his credit, nay, at last he did not scruple to make use both of the public money, and that of private individuals, which passed through his hands. This could not be managed so secretly as not to excite some murmuring among the honester part of those in administration; and although the voice of such persons has great difficulty in making itself heard, and is soon overcome, yet a man almost as unprincipled as himself, who had long desired to succeed him in his principal place, exposed his malversations. Among the misfortunes to which those men who succeed in their ambitious projects are exposed, there is one that rarely fails to overtake them, namely, a fall as sudden as their rise. There are few ministers who die

in office; few sycophants who remain in favour to the last. The little conspiracy that was got up against Dauvert, was carried on in silence: his colleagues in office continued to behave to him with the same attentions and respect as before; nor was it until he one morning read in the Moniteur a public exposure of his delinquencies, that he had any suspicion of what was going on against him.

There are people in the world who have the art of covering one scandal by another; and it was this that Dauvert now put in practice. He conceived that all that he had to do in order to impose upon those who were raising an outcry against him; to dazzle the weak and foolish; to recover his credit; and induce the ministers to employ him again; was to live in greater style, and be more extravagant than ever. His wife, still young and handsome, made every effort to second him in his views; and never had she before played off her arts of coquetry to so much advantage; nor

was this coquetry incompatible with her sentimental and romantic disposition: It was not difficult for her to find admirers among those men who affected to be as sentimental as herself; nor is it to be supposed that a woman who piqued herself upon so much sensibility and feeling as Alphonsine, returned the impassioned advances of her gallants with coldness and indifference. She had first an intrigue that did not transpire; the second excited some suspicion; the third became town-talk; and her husband conceived that his honour was insulted.

Is it not extraordinary to see a man who has no scruples, nor sense of honour, on any other occasion, seriously distress himself at the infidelity of a woman for whom he has neither regard nor affection, and towards whom he himself has been any thing but faithful? Dauvert had now some very furious scenes with his wife; he provoked one of her favourites

by whom he was wounded; and rendered more violent in consequence, he coarsely abused and ill-treated Madame, who left the house, and sought an asylum with one of her friends. After this he was threatened with a suit for a divorce, and was called upon to give an account of his wife's fortune; while to complete his ruin his own creditors assailed him, and government was about to bring against him a charge of peculation of the public money. Having hastily collected together his own and his wife's jewels and converted them into money; sold off privately a considerable part of his furniture, and availed himself of what credit he had left to borrow various sums from money-lenders and usurers, he suddenly decamped, with the intention of proceeding to Switzerland, hoping that in a foreign country he should be able to enjoy undisturbed that of which he had robbed his wife and creditors.

He travelled alone, in a postchaise; and had nearly reached the frontiers, when his impatience became almost intolerable: never had he before been in such agitation—an agitation occasioned as much by the remorse he began to feel, as by the anxiety to be out of France, and beyond pursuit. On the third evening of his flight he was overtaken by a violent storm: the rain fell in torrents; the thunder rolled almost incessantly; the lightning seemed to shiver the clouds; and the road became impassable. Seized with terror, the postillion could no longer direct or govern his horses, which ran away, and overturned the carriage. Dauvert had one of his legs broken, and, incapable of stirring, laid groaning and crying out; but his cries brought no friendly aid to his succour; they only served to attract some banditti, who had seen the chaise approaching, and who now hastened to strip the unfortunate traveller of all the

property he had about him. On seeing robbers approach, the postillion betook himself to flight; and Dauvert, in spite of the agony he suffered, seemed deter-mined not to yield, and they were ac-tually obliged to wrench out of his hand the pocket-book that contained the fruits of his fraud and villanies. Then having almost stripped him of every thing else, they left him half dead beneath some trees; and it was now that the wretched man, recalling to memory his past actions, thought that he perceived in this accident the vengeance of hea-ven.

At day-break a stranger was riding by attended by a servant, and seeing a man lying stretched out on the ground, leaped from his horse, raised his head, and thinking that he still perceived signs of life, dispatched his servant in all haste to the nearest village for a surgeon. He then took off his own great coat to cover the dying man, and fetching

some water in his hat from a brook, sprinkled his face, in hopes that it might recover him; but all these efforts were in vain. At length the surgeon arrived, and the stranger helped him to dress the wounds, and to bind up the leg of the unfortunate man, which was dreadfully mangled. The servant had very thoughtfully had the precaution to have a litter brought, and on this they placed Dauvert; and the stranger directed that he should be taken to his own house, which was about three quarters of a league distant. And then giving his horse to his servant, he walked by the side of the litter, supporting all the way the head of the unfortunate man. But who then was this compassionate stranger who bestowed so many attentions on the miserable object before him? It was no other than George Dercy, he who had been so cruelly persecuted by the man to whom he had behaved—to whom

he was now behaving, with so much kindness!

It is necessary that we should here go back a little in our story, and inform our readers how it had happened that we meet with our hero again in such a place, and under such circumstances. It was now eight years ago since George abandoning himself to a gloomy misanthropy, had quitted Paris, after having stripped himself of four-fifths of his fortune. It was reported at the time, that his departure was hastened by a letter that he had just received, the very day before he had announced his intentions to his relations, and the disposition of his property, which he had made in their favour. Nor was this report unfounded: this letter was from his confidential servant Joseph, whom he had sent in search of Victorine to Havre, and who now gave him some tidings of her. It was dated from London; and Joseph informed his master that the very day

on which he reached Havre, after having made inquiry at all the inns and hotels in the town after Mademoiselle Lorsay and her gouvernante, he had found an English packet on the point of sailing for Southampton; and among the passengers were an English family, consisting of an elderly gentleman, his lady, and two daughters from about twelve to fifteen years old. Great was the astonishment of Joseph at finding that among the persons who formed the suite of this family, were Mademoiselle Victorine and Madame Deschamps. He thought that it was better for him not to speak to them, or let them see him; but he determined that he would not lose them out of his sight; and therefore without going back to the inn where he had stopped, he took his passage on board the packet, taking care not to be observed by those whom he himself was going to watch. During the whole passage he carefully avoided their no-

tice, always keeping on deck when they were in the cabin, and going down below whenever they came up to breathe the fresh air. During their passage, which, owing to the foul weather which came on, was a long one, Joseph formed an acquaintance with one of the servants, who could speak French, who informed him that his master was Sir Henry Tayling, a baronet, and that the family were now returning to England after having been spending several months in France. While they were at Havre, Lady Tayling was regretting that she had been able to meet with no one whom she should like to take back with her as a French governess for her daughters, having been satisfied with none of the persons who, at the various towns where they had been, had applied to be received in that capacity; when at length, on the very day before they left Havre, they saw a charming young person come to the hotel where the

family were lodging, accompanied by an old lady. This young lady dined at the *table d'hôte*, and was seated next to the two Miss Taylings, who soon became quite familiar with her, and conceived a friendship for Mademoiselle Dubourg, the name under which Victorine had introduced herself to them. Both Sir Henry and his Lady, too, were so charmed with the fascinating and ingenuous manners of the young stranger, and with her attentions towards her aged companion, that when dinner was over they invited both the ladies to take tea with them in their own apartment. The servant could not inform Joseph of what had passed during the evening, but he could perceive every time that he had occasion to enter the room, that all the family paid the utmost attentions towards Mademoiselle, who seemed to have been speaking of something that interested them all very much, for his Lady was listening to her

very attentively, and the younger of the Miss Taylings held her hand, while the elder sister was looking at her apparently much affected by what she had been telling them. He was not, however, the less surprised on hearing, the following day, that Mademoiselle Dubourg was to go with them in the quality of governess and companion to the young ladies, and that she had obtained permission to have Madame Deschamps continue with her: the latter, who had not judged it necessary to change her name, was to assist the housekeeper. The family proceeded to London as soon as they had landed at Southampton, and Joseph determined to follow them; and having before inquired of the servant in what part of the town they resided, he hired a furnished room, in a street in the same neighbourhood, and it was from this place that he wrote to his master these details.

It is easy to conceive how transported George was at the contents of this

letter. He was now cured of his misanthropy and vexations; for all that he thought of at first was, that Victorine was found, without reflecting that it was in order to escape from him that she was submitting to a species of servitude. "She is found!" exclaimed he; and then without losing an instant he wrote to Dharville to apprize him that he was about to leave Paris, and to his solicitor to confirm the arrangements he had been making with regard to the disposition of his property, and then immediately set out on his journey. Before receiving Joseph's letter, it had been his intention to go and live as a recluse, among the mountains of Jura: that was the country in which Victorine was born, and it was there that he desired to live and to die; but the intelligence he had just received had now altered all his views, and he therefore took the road to Calais.

Hardly was he beyond the walls of

the capital before he began to breathe more freely, for he seemed now to be beyond the reach of those who had so basely persecuted him, and to have escaped from that fickle multitude whose calumnies and praises had excited in him nearly an equal disgust: nor was the thought that he was about to see Victorine once more, the least of his consolations. He seemed, too, to recover his independence and his happiness at beholding the beauties of nature; and again he thought that every one looked on him kindly, and that malignant and envious persons were to be found only in crowded cities. Should he not be able to inspire Victorine with compassion, he determined to go then and reside in the place where she was born, in the neighbourhood of which was Leclercq's manufactory: but she loved him, she had even confessed her love; would she then be able to resist his entreaties, or to withstand the

feelings of her own heart? This idea filled him with the most delightful hopes, and he pursued his journey without apprehension.

As soon as he arrived in London, he hurried to Joseph's lodging, and threw himself into the arms of this faithful servant. From the window of the room where he now was he could behold the house in which his Victorine resided; and what were his feelings soon afterwards on seeing her come out arm-in-arm with her youngest pupil, while the other and Madame Deschamps followed! It was with difficulty that Joseph could prevent him from running out into the street, to speak to her, or even to throw himself at her feet.

In consequence of his former connexion with the Duke of ***, George found that he knew one of the secretaries of the French ambassador; and as soon therefore as he had somewhat recovered from his agitation of spirits

he went to call upon him. He had no difficulty in prevailing upon this gentleman, who had a considerable esteem for him, to engage to present him as a countryman of his to Sir Henry Tayling. Both the baronet and his lady were very amiable persons: they had been instantly struck with the fascinating manners and ingenuous countenance of Victorine, and daily congratulated themselves upon being fully justified in the favourable opinion they had formed of her; and they treated her with far more kindness and respect than she had ever experienced under the roof of M. Dubrocard. This worthy couple were much affected when George related to them his attachment to their young protegee, and the excess of delicacy on her part that had induced her to refuse him. They perceived with regret that they were about to lose the excellent governess they had found for their daughters; but they consoled

themselves with the reflection that it was for her benefit, and that her happiness would be secured by it. Although their acquaintance with her was but very recent, the attachment they felt towards her was as great as if they had known her for several years. Her ladyship even promised to intercede with Victorine in George's behalf, and on her informing her of what had passed, the terrified girl exclaimed: "How then, does he pursue me even beneath your roof!—Does he wish to disturb the tranquillity that I flattered myself I had found here!"

It was, however, impossible for her long to conceal her real sentiments towards him; or not to acknowledge that she felt deeply how sincerely Dercy was attached to her, and was affected by the proofs he had given of passion in thus endeavouring to discover her: and if she experienced a little vexation at what she termed his persecution, she felt much more satisfaction and joy at finding her-

self so beloved by the man whom she esteemed. At length, overcome by her ladyship's entreaties, she consented to see him. Having informed her as briefly as possible of all that occurred to him since they last saw each other, and of the manner in which he had disposed of the bulk of his property, he exclaimed:—"O! Victorine, happy should I have been to have made you rich, but you refused me that gratification; for your sake, therefore, have I renounced wealth, and have reserved for myself only that sum which I would have forced upon you. You would not permit me to render you my equal in point of fortune. I have therefore given up my superfluous wealth in order to become your equal."

Surprised and greatly affected, Victorine gazed first at George, then cast her eyes on Lady Fayling, who, nearly as much moved as herself, took her hand and placed it in that of her lover. She did not attempt to withdraw her hand, but, with downcast eyes and a

blushing cheek, confessed that she could now raise no further objections to their union; and a few days afterwards the nuptial ceremony was performed at the French Ambassador's chapel

Dercy and his wife quitted England almost immediately, and went to reside on the borders of Switzerland, at the birth-place of the latter; where George laid out the two hundred thousand francs he had reserved to himself, in the purchase of lands, on which he built a small but neat and comfortable house. Here he dwelt in the bosom of domestic felicity, their union having been blessed with two children; and here too he enjoyed the society of his neighbour, Leclercq, and the friendship of Dharville, who came every year to spend a few weeks with Dercy in this peaceful retreat. The comfort and felicity that reigned in his own domestic circle, seemed to extend itself on every side; for he was solicitous to diffuse the blessings he himself en-

joyed, and to promote industry, and to encourage and extend, both by his example and advice, the employment of all those improvements that science and philanthropy united have introduced into the arts of life. He had at first to contend with obstinacy and prejudice; but had, at length, the satisfaction of seeing ignorance and want, idleness and vice, gradually disappear. He was not rich enough to form, by his own means alone, useful and benevolent establishments; but he possessed a zeal and energy that supplied the want of fortune; and he set subscriptions on foot for forming saving-banks, a Lancasterian school, and a society for the encouragement of vaccination. He could not erect hospitals, but he assisted and relieved all those whom age, infirmity, and sickness, hindered from labouring for their subsistence; and in all these acts of benevolence Madame Dercy shared with her husband.

We must confess that our hero still retained much of his former simplicity of character and single-heartedness; and it was more particularly with regard to the public events of the day that this part of his character displayed itself. When the revolutions of Spain, Naples, and Portugal, took place, he supposed that the principles on which they were founded were recognized by their respective princes; but he grieved for both the people and their masters, when the congresses and battles informed him that the sovereigns had accepted the constitutions only out of policy. He had the simplicity to imagine that, after the victories our arms had obtained in Spain, that country would be governed according to the principles of the glorious decree of Andujar; and to suppose that all the European powers would take the part of the Greeks against the Turks. He once flattered himself for a short time that France was about to enter

into a negociation with Hayti, and he rejoiced both on account of the state and the families of the old colonists. When he saw that the English had recognized the independance of South America, he regretted that France, which had contributed so much towards that of North America, had not set the example. After all, notwithstanding that he had more than once been deceived in his hopes, and notwithstanding what he saw actually passing in the two hemispheres, he thought that the attempts made to arrest the course of the human race towards ultimate perfection, were only temporary; and that the progress of reason and intelligence, though slow, were certain; while the hope which he entertained of the general felicity of mankind rendered his own private happiness still sweeter to him. Persecuted by his fellow-creatures he had indulged in a violent fit of misanthropy; but, in the bosom of his family and surrounded by neighbours to whose virtues he had

contributed by his example, he indulged in the most exalted philanthropy and benevolence.

Dercy was returning from his friend Leclercq's at the time that he found and recognized the miserable Dauvert, who received both from him and his amiable wife every attention that his deplorable state demanded. For several days the wretched man continued in a delirium; nor was it until he was completely recovered, that Dercy visited him, thinking that his presence must be painful to one by whom he had been so basely treated.

At the sight of his benefactor Dauvert was greatly shocked, and for some time continued in sullen silence. At first he refused to avow the reason of his flight from Paris, but he had betrayed himself in his fits of delirium. It was an additional torment to those he already suffered, to perceive the harmony and tranquillity that reigned in this abode. The

mutual affection of the husband and wife, and the felicity that surrounded them. It was also a torment still more keen to be at length convinced, when too late, that the only real happiness was that which he had disdained. At first he would have rejected the money that George generously offered him, that he might pursue his journey; but he was in such a state of utter destitution, and it was tendered him with so much delicacy, that he at length accepted it. But this was not all: rarely is malignity so rooted in the human breast, that it can resist the unremitted kindnesses of an injured benefactor; and, overcome by such an excess of goodness, he confessed all his guilt, avowed his remorse for his past conduct, supplicated Percy to pardon his ingratitude, and promised to repair as far as possible his former crimes, by an entire change of life. Whether this repentance was but momentary, or whether he would have

fulfilled it, we are unable to say, for he perished in crossing the Atlantic on his way to America

We have seen, then, that after all, our Novice was more intelligent than those who piqued themselves so much on their cleverness and knowledge of the world; and although ridiculed for his simplicity and ignorance, far more intelligent and prudent than those who conceived themselves to be so much his superiors in wisdom. He at length enjoyed real felicity, whilst those who had despised or persecuted him, closed their days either in shame, misery, or disgust. And the event which conducted to his house the most bitter and the most vindictive of all his enemies, proved to him the source of the most delicious pleasures that a virtuous mind can taste, namely, that of succouring an adversary in distress—of converting an ungrateful heart.

Who then are those who are really blind to their own interests, and truly

novices with respect to what most important art—the art of happiness? Men void of principle, men without integrity; the covetous, the mercenary; and above all, the ambitious. It is the charlatan who makes pretensions that he cannot support; it is the plotting sycophant, the manœuvring intriguer, who meanly crawls and fawns in order that he may rise, but who at length either falls or is thrown down, and is then spurned, and crushed; it is the envious wretch, who, while he attempts to injure another, does most injury to himself; it is the proud man, who is at once flattered and despised, who would compel universal homage, and who ultimately meets with general contempt.

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